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The Reformed Journal

A PERIODICAL OF REFORMED COMMENT AND OPINION

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By JAMES DAANE

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The State of Theology in the Church

By James Daane

AS CHURCHES GO, the Christian Reformed Church is not large. Yet her size is sufficient to make the fact significant that her fiber of orthodoxy is evenly and unbrokenly distributed. Unlike many denominations, and in spite of wide geographical spread, the Christian Reformed Church is not more or less orthodox, depending on the sector under consideration. Her orthodoxy is as wide and big as the denomination itself. It is this happy circumstance that warranted the designation of Professor John Kromminga's study of the Christian Reformed Church as *A Study in Orthodoxy.*

The intent of Professor Kromminga was to uncover the reasons for this long-retained, over-all pattern of orthodoxy. The intent of this writing is of another kind. It will seek to describe the states of the theology of the Christian Reformed Church on her first centennial birthday. What will fall under consideration is not theological orthodoxy of the institution's official documents, but the state of her theological orthodoxy as it obtains in the actual life and practices of her churches.

The validity of recognizing the distinction between "official" and "actual" orthodoxy will be readily admitted. Everyone knows that a church may be officially orthodox long after it has ceased to be so in life and practice. Like any other, an ecclesiastical institution may exist long after the initial dynamic which gave it reality and form has died. When this happens, the institution may continue to be officially orthodox without being actually so. By "the state of theology," therefore, I mean the health of that theology by which our churches actually live and upon which they ground and justify their practices.

I do not boast of being altogether equal to the task. The difficulties are obviously many. The situation to be analyzed breaks through the surface, but exists in the heart and life of the churches. I do not claim a 20-20 vision, nor a comparable analytical perceptiveness. I see in part, and only with my own eyes. What I see, or think to see, will bear the limited focus of my understanding and point of perspective. Others may see differently, perhaps more clearly. But the task needs doing. It appears that no critical evaluation of our theology-in-life-and-practice has been made in a long time. The time, then, would appear to be ripe. Indeed, since we are committed to the disciplinary principle of self-examination and self-reformation, any time is a proper time for theological self-examination. But centennial-time would seem to be especially propitious. A Centennial is a reminder that our theology too has passed through the changes of history, and it is a call to evaluate these changes. Centennial-time being propitious, and the task calling for the doing, I am moved to attempt the difficult task.

The personal dangers of diagnosis and evaluation could, even with a display of serious concern, be evaded by merely repeating that some say this, and some that, about our theological situation. But the reader is as unlikely to be seriously impressed by anonymous concerns, as he is unhelped by a retelling of what he already knows. Despite the dangers, therefore, I am constrained to present the reader with a personal evaluation of the state of theology in our churches. It will admittedly be one man's vision and perception; but it shall be presented as seen. It is done in the hope that it will be one in which others find themselves concurring, or at the least, somewhat helped to better set their own sights.

ORTHODOXY AND LIFE

The most apparent feature of the Christian Reformed Church's theology is its patent orthodoxy. From this judgment, few will dissent. It may be said with confidence that the sound of that gospel which is the power of God unto salvation is heard in every pulpit. Christian Reformed pulpits do not offer men stones for bread. This is not a boast but a simple recognition of God's blessing. Anyone contemplating affiliation with any Christian Reformed congregation can be certain that its pulpit will ring each Sunday with the good news of what God has done in Christ for the salvation of sinners. A survey of American churches would on this score present a study in contrast. Yet it can be said without reservation that there is not a single church or minister in the Christian Reformed denomination which preaches another gospel than the gospel of God concerning his Son. It is a pleasant circumstance that the actual facts protect such a claim from possible charge of pride. This pervasive loyalty of Christian Reformed congregations and ministers to the gospel of the Cross of Christ is reason for lively and warm gratitude at this time of centennial. It provides occasion for making this last year of our first one hundred a time of renewed resolve that under God we shall, through obedience to His gospel of grace, keep it so in the future.

One further thing may be said about this orthodoxy of the pulpit. It imparts substance to most

Christian Reformed sermons. One can indeed be orthodox in a quiet unsubstantial way. The reader has doubtless heard orthodox clergymen in orthodox churches deliver orthodox sermons, yet sermons most aptly described as "sermons that convey so little." What one hears in many churches is good, but so little that is good is said. There are many exceptions, to be sure, but I describe fairly, I think, the general situation in evangelical churches: orthodoxy without great substance.

This pervasive fabric of orthodoxy so perceptible in Christian Reformed pulpits, runs not merely across the present, but extends deep into the past. It is characteristic of our history. We have had few heresy trials during our one hundred years, and such as we had were more indicative of orthodoxy than of a desire to abandon it. Only within a very conservative Church could a truth like common grace become the occasion for doctrinal controversy and trial. Not once in a hundred years have men been brought to trial for directly contesting the official orthodoxy of the Christian Reformed Church. This is evident from the fact that in the three major heresy trials which took place, the Church felt the necessity of drawing up additional statements relative to the matters at issue. Official theological position was imperiled only by indirection. As regards Modernism, the truth is more that it did not arise in our churches, than that it was expelled. Today, as in the past, the leadership of the Christian Reformed Church desires to be orthodox. The designation is still accepted with honor; none regards it as a stigma. This is reason for genuine satisfaction.

But life is more than meat, and the body than raiment. As the Christian life is more than doctrinal correctness, so theological health is more than mere orthodoxy. An unorthodox theology can hardly be healthy, but an orthodox theology is not necessarily so. In Christ, life and truth interpenetrate, for He is at once the Life and the Truth. But in orthodoxy life may suffer a fall-out; orthodoxy may remain, after life has departed. A church may be very orthodox — and very dead. Her theology may be right, but embalmed; her creeds precise and correct, yet no more than sacred antiques, interesting and valuable as historic exhibits for an ecclesiastical museum. In such a situation nothing more is really demanded than a kind of ancestor worship. One need not even pay his respects to the dead, except in the sense that he speaks of them no ill.

A church's theology should be right, but it should also be living, and the fact that it is right, does not guarantee that it is alive. A church's theology should be correct, but it should also be a corrective factor in her life. The point to be observed is that a church may be theologically orthodox without being theologically vibrant, her theology very correct and very dead. The health of a church and her theolog is not indicated simply by the degree of her orth doxy. Indeed, a church less orthodox than anoth may be more pleasing in the eyes of her Lord b cause she actually lives by the lights of such orth doxy as she has.

If to be truly healthy is to be truly alive, the the actual state of theology in the Christian R formed Church cannot be said to be of sound healt In the good sense of the word, her theology is orth dox and conservative. But living, vibrant, growin expanding, existential, sensitive, and responsive the theological challenges and needs of her time No.

Evidence that her theological orthodoxy is iner inarticulate, unresponsive, and without the spark of life, is as abundant as sad to contemplate. I sha point to only a few pieces of such evidence and pa on to the more important question of the causes this unhealthy theological quietude.

Theologically speaking, we live in a day when is great to be alive. Theology in our time has li erally exploded into life. The last thirty years ha been years of tremendous activity and research. A most the whole field of theology bristles with a v tality that is electric and electrifying. New Test ment studies flourish as they did not for decade producing an abundance of theological book pamphlets, and articles, on almost every conceivab phase of the New Testament. Prodigious studi have been made of New Testament words and co cepts, the chief of which is Kittel's *Wörterbuch*. F the first time the Church has turned tremendous e ergy upon the universal and cosmic aspects of Ne Testament Eschatology. This voluminous researc and scholarly investigation of the Bible has affecte theology like a resurrection. Systematic Theologi are again being written. After a period in whi they were viewed with disdain as something ou moded, such men as Barth, Brunner, Tillich, an Chafer, are again writing systematic theologies. significant part of this theological renaissance a the extensive studies into the meaning and nature the Church, stimulated largely by the Ecumenic Movement. To all this must be added the revival interest in the theology of the Reformers, with i particularly expansive research into the thought Calvin and Luther. The productivity of this r surgence of theological activity is of such magn tude that even the professional theologian finds difficult to keep pace with the developments. It a scintillating time for the theologian to be aliv It is therefore particularly saddening to obser that the Christian Reformed Church has been larg ly untouched and unmoved by this robust outbur of theological vitality. She has made no mentio able contribution to this resurgence of theology, a done nothing to determine its direction. She h

rather been almost wholly insensitive to it. This is the more disheartening when we consider that she is perhaps the largest consistently orthodox Church in America, and by tradition and avowal a lover of theology and the Scriptures.

It little profits to bewail this state of our theological affairs. It is of greater profit to discover the causes. Why has a church which believes her future to be so dependent on theology not been stimulated by stimulating times to be productive out of her own tremendous resources? Why has she not been stabbed awake by the electrifying theological movements of recent decades? Why does a church which entertains a high view of the Bible do so much less theologically with the Bible than those which hold a much lower view? Why does the most sizable orthodox denomination in America do so little in the area of her allegedly special strength? Why has her theology gone stale and stagnant? How can she return to theological health?

* * *

It is doubtless true that a major reason for our failure to enter into and be stimulated by the remarkable theological movements of recent decades is the fact that we were — and in large degree still are — an immigrant church. Fear and defensive mood are natural pyschological reactions to the strange and unfamiliar. It was therefore quite natural that a relatively small immigrant church in a large and strange land should live by very pronounced psychological motifs of "holding the line" and "playing it safe" for the very good purpose of not losing what she had taken from the land of her birth. Up to a point, this was a necessary and wholesome frame of mind. It is less natural and no longer wholesome, however, that after one hundred years these should still be the dominating motifs. That they still are, is a tribute to our genius in constructing and manipulating those techniques which create and preserve mass-insulation and a mass-mind. The fear of theological liberalism so frequently voiced at present is often more a reflex of this immigrant psychology of "preserving what we have" than a legitimate fear elicited by actual threat. Indeed, the greatest damage and threat to genuine orthodoxy stems from this fear. It is this insistence on ecclesiastical and theological insularity that causes our theology to stagnate and atrophy, which in turn causes our more lively theological minds, many of whom now pursue study in American and European seminaries and universities, to read the more liberal theological works with the relish of hungry appetites, and to find our own theology by comparison quite warmed-up and cooked-over. Theological hunger will feed on what is available. Unless our theology comes alive and constructively progressive, we shall soon see the day when Barth's *Dogmatik* in English is devoured with relish, without the refined, discriminating taste connoisseurs exercise only when not excessively hungry. Barth and many others have raised *new* questions which our old answers do not answer, not because they are old or wrong, but because they do not fit the new form of the question. We cannot therefore rely on the old pyschology of "holding the fort" and "keeping what we have," for the indications are already present that it will not hold the fort nor keep what we have. He that hath eyes, let him see.

There is, however, a more basic reason for our failure to make theological advance than the psychological one. The psychological fear of the strange and new and its insular and isolationistic mood which counsels the timid that preserving the heritage and playing it safe is the chief end of man, will automatically pass with the passing of time. The old techniques which so effectively employed this psychology of fear in the creation and preservation of a uniform mass-mind in our churches, will prove ineffective on a future membership which is neither immigrant nor son of immigrant. The more basic reason for our failure to make theological advance has to do with theological method. Every theology, including our own, derives the specifics of its methodology and form from the problems which it originally confronted and desired to solve. It appears to me that the theological problems we raised and the method we employed to solve them, have served their purpose and run their course, and have now reached the point beyond which no theological advance will or can be made. Our theological plight calls for a fresh reformulation of the theological task and the creation and utilization of a new theological approach achieved in the light of the present and with the aid of what we have learned in the past. It is certain that we cannot continue to theologize in the manner in which we have done in the past, a manner of theologizing which produced theological hair-splitting and split churches but made no theological contributions, at least none which are taken seriously by anybody. Either we carefully assay our situation and begin to theologize afresh and anew, or we shall have no theological future at all.

Theological Self-Fascination

If theology is the queen of the sciences, then it may be said that she is susceptible to the feminine temptation to gaze upon her own self-reflection with fixed fascination. Stated in terms of the theologian, the theologian is tempted to reflect on his own theology rather than upon the Scripture. The threshold of resistance here is usually low. The fact that his theology, if biblical, can be called truth, lends an apparent legitimacy to the self-fascination.

Should not one be fascinated with truth? One of the main signs that a theology has succumbed to self-fascination and is theologizing upon itself rather than upon Scripture is the flourishing of Systematic Theology and the withering of Biblical Theology. When this happens Systematic Theology dominates all biblical studies and fosters a dogmatic exegesis. Biblical truth that cannot be nicely fitted into the systematic *corpus* is simply ignored, or when necessity compells that it be given attention, as in the pulpit, it is interpreted in terms of accepted dogmatic definitions.

What on this point is the actual state of affairs in the Christian Reformed Church? Systematic Theology occupies the center of the stage. Biblical Theology plays but a minor role. This is the picture of the curriculum in Calvin Seminary, and is the actual arrangement of the theological furniture in the mind of the average Christian Reformed minister. This is an unwholesome situation, since Systematic Theology derives its life and impulse to progress from Biblical Theology. Unless Systematic Theology constantly draws upon the well-springs of Biblical Studies, it becomes hard and arid and ceases to flourish. Divorced from the main-spring of life, it precipitates into the pulpit ministers, unaccustomed to biblical study who preach Systematic Theology rather than Scripture. To be sure, sermons still have texts, but they have little to do with the text avowedly under consideration. John 3:16, for example, becomes the basis for a discourse on election, and sermons become conveyors of Systematic Theology rather than of Scripture. They sound metallic, and are regarded as dull and irrelevant by those who hear. The results tend to be particularly disastrous in the "catechism sermon." The temptation being greater to preach doctrines-reduced-to-definitions, the danger is also greater that the catechism sermon loses the heartbeat of life. When on the academic level where ministers are trained, theology fails to sustain a vital relationship to the Bible and Biblical Studies and reflects instead simply upon itself, the pew receives doctrinal definitions rather than the Word in living form, and lectures that are more like sermons than sermons are supposed to be like lectures. The mind appears to be fed, but the heart goes untouched, because there is no heartbeat in it. When theology succumbs to this temptation of self-fascination and thinks it has life in itself, the breath of death is lurking in both academic hall and pulpit.

What theology needs in our time and churches is a deliberate and conscious return to a sustained and continuing study of the Sacred Scriptures. To come alive again it must return to the living Word, and then it will live again in the Church's mind and heart, in her academic halls and pulpits. It little profits to contend for a high view of biblical inspiration, if we continue, particularly on the academic theological level, to so largely ignore the Bible. If our theology is again to become sufficiently fascinating to engage the mind of our theologians, relevant and vibrant enough to command the loyalties and convictions of our membership, the Bible must again become a source of life and fascination. When the Bible again claims the fascination of our theologians, they will no longer be tempted Narcissus-like simply to gaze and reflect upon the inherited theology. Their calling and conscience will prevent them from thinking that they are teaching theology and producing theologians for the future when they are in fact merely repeating what has been handed down in the name of rendering homage to the great theologians of the past. Only a fresh return to the Scriptures will again give our churches a living theology and genuine theologians.

The Lure of the "Central Doctrine"

There is one form of theological self-fascination which, I think, is clearly discernible in the theological history of Christian Reformed churches. In this form of theological self-fascination the fashion is to select some single doctrine and posit it as the "central doctrine" or "fundamental principle" of Scripture. The proper method of executing the theological task is then regarded as that of interpreting as far as is humanly possible all other biblical truths within the terms and limits of this "central doctrine." All other doctrines must be molded to the size and shape dictated by it. Such doctrines as are undeniably scriptural but cannot be logically related to the central doctrine are sometimes designated as apparently contradictory and are always relegated to the periphery, where they are given but marginal interest and allowed little or no real impact upon the system. Since the significance of such truths cannot be derived from the central doctrine, the attention they receive is largely dictated by subjective, personal considerations. Common grace, the general offer of the gospel, human responsibility, sovereignty as the Lordship of Christ expressed in His victory over sin and death,[1] are illustrations in point.

Although the theological task ever remains unfinished, it is easy to see that the task construed as the interpretation of all Christian truths in terms of the central doctrine is a limited task and, as such a task, sooner or later a finished task. This is so first, because the theological potential inherent in any human formulation of any central truth is lim-

1. This rich and profound New Testament teaching concerning the Lordship of Christ finds in the exposition of the kingship of Christ in Berkhof's *Systematic Theology* no treatment at all, since his methodology (dictated by the central doctrine) demands a consideration of sovereignty *before* he discusses the person and work of Jesus Christ

ed, being only a human formulation; second, because the system thus constructed will be paid such steem that newly gained biblical insights which do ot nicely fit into the system without modifying or ven exploding its whole structure, will be simply gnored. The task as originally set being finished, othing remains but to defend the system against oth heresy and new biblical insights.

This procedure of attempting to define all other octrines in reference to, and in harmony with, the emands of an accepted central doctrine, is the proedure largely pursued by our theology in the past. his process has run its course; the task has long een completed. The theological potential which vas inherent in the central doctrine has been exausted; the passion which conducted this theological experiment, spent. We are no longer on a theological quest. New biblical insights are viewed as uspect simply because they are new, no consideration being given to their claim to biblical sanction. he newer biblical understanding of the pervasive schatological character of the gospel and its moment of proclamation of judgment and grace, so ich with suggestion for "the general offer of the gospel," is simply ignored both by those who affirm uch an offer and by those who deny it, to the loss f both, and to the loss of the possibility of attaining a common understanding. Revitalization and dvance will occur only when we abandon the method of theological self-reflection upon our central doctrine and consciously return to study the Scriptures new, not merely to refine some element in our present theological system, but to gain new perspectives nd new understanding of biblical truth. It may well be that such biblical studies will demand that our theology be set in a more biblical focus and perspective.

* * *

In Reformed theology the sovereignty of God was widely accepted as the central doctrine.[2] While in the broader cultural sense of the term "Calvinism" sovereignty has meant the Lordship of *Christ*, in the more restricted area of theology proper sovereignty has meant the sovereignty of *God*. Under the claim of the superiority of theocentric over Christocentric, sovereignty came to be increasingly interpreted, not in terms of Christ as Lord in whom our election takes place, but in terms of God's sovereignty as expressed in terms of both an election and reprobation apart from Christ.[3] Election and reprobation as something antecedent to Christ came increasingly to be regarded as the special key to unlock the nature of the central doctrine of divine sovereignty. Though it is not in the tradition of classical Reformed theology, election and reprobation, consciously or unconsciously, came to be regarded as equally expressive and revelatory of divine sovereignty. Consequently, it was not so much sovereign *election* as *sovereignty as such* which was in fact the central doctrine.

At this point in the process of theological reflection a transformation so subtle took place that it frequently escaped notice. Election and reprobation having been equated as equally definitive of divine sovereignty, election suffered distortion by being equated with reprobation. God's sovereignty was no longer expressed in terms of a gracious election to salvation, but in terms of the sovereignty of reprobation, which came to be regarded as the definitive key to the understanding of God's sovereignty. In actual fact, sovereignty defined in terms of the sovereignty of reprobation became the central doctrine. This may be illustrated by a reference to Christ. Sovereignty was not defined in terms of the Lordship of Christ, which looms so large in the New Testament teaching and which is there described as God's redemptive triumph over sin and death and hell through the events of the Cross and Resurrection, nor in terms of the Christ who will return at history's end to execute judgment, as Paul says, "according to my gospel." Rather, the Lordship of Christ was, within Reformed theology proper, defined, when it was considered at all, within the limits of the simple fact that Christ, as the agent through whom God executed His sovereignty of election and reprobation, saved some and not others.

The Lordship of Christ over all men and over all of their lives was something that could be preached and put into practice, and therefore became the insignia by which Calvinists wished to be known and did become known in the cultural-social sphere. Yet in the area of theology they were stigmatized with the label of reprobation, something which cannot as such be preached, for it is not strictly speaking an object of faith, since, as H. Bavinck urged, reprobation is something which no man may believe as the truth about himself. Thus the very truth which could not be preached nor practiced became not only the stigma that was increasingly associated with Calvinism, but, because it became increasingly regarded as equally expressive of divine

2. This fact alone explodes the myth that Reformed theology is a finely balanced system of truth which gives equal recognition to such equally valid but apparently contradictory truths as divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Did anyone ever suggest that human responsibility be regarded as the central doctrine or the fundamental principle of Calvinism? Did any Reformed theologian produce a systematic theology which began with a consideration of man and his responsibility rather than with God and his sovereignty?

3. Thus, just as it discusses divine sovereignty before it discusses Christ, Berkhof's *Systematic Theology* discusses predestination, including both election and reprobation, in its first loci where it treats the subject of God, before it discusses the person and work of Christ. Thus its very methodology lends sanction to both H. Hoeksema and C. Van Til's contention that election and reprobation ought to be the point of departure for theology.

sovereignty as election, became a hindrance in the attempt to woo men to an acceptance of the Lordship of Christ in the broad cultural-social areas. Perhaps here lies one of the reasons that we as churches have had so little success in gaining an acceptance for the broad Calvinistic principle of the Lordship of Christ.

That God's sovereignty was in fact defined with a primal reference to reprobation is evident from a considerable amount of historical data. In the most important theological discussions which took place the predominant concern was *not* to account for and elaborate upon the truth that by the grace of God sinners were saved. The chief theological endeavor was to explain that reprobates are *not saved.* Theology was fascinated not with the salvation of the elect through God's electing redemptive grace. It appears rather to have been fascinated with the problem of accounting for the possibility of sin, unbelief, and the doom of the reprobate. The explanation was said to be the sovereignty of God, and in the attempt to account for these in terms of God's sovereignty, divine sovereignty was defined and shaped into something that would serve this purpose. Thus it came about that the sovereignty of God which was defined equally in reference to election *and* reprobation at best became a *neutral* concept, equally adaptable for the explanation of both, and at worst became a concept of sovereignty best fitted to account for sin, unbelief, and damnation. The theologies of both Herman Hoeksema and Cornelius Van Til are simply an extension of this theological motif which seeks to account for the elect and reprobate in terms of divine sovereignty. For both, history is simply a process of discrimination between elect and reprobate. Van Til, attempting to overcome the staticism inherent in Hoeksema's theology, emphasizes the idea of historical process as a means of accounting not only for the discrimination, but for the emergence and development of elect and reprobate. Yet since he attempts to explain sin apart from a reference to history and wholly in reference to sovereignty and thus remains wholly within the presuppositions of the theological motif which he holds in common with Hoeksema, Van Til never really transcends the staticism of Hoeksema's theology.

It is because the theologies of Hoeksema and Van Til are but an extension of this theological motif long resident in the theological mind of the Christian Reformed Churches, that both theologies touch a responsive chord in these churches, the reception given them limited chiefly by loyalty to ecclesiastical institutionalism. The theologies of Hoeksema and Van Til being but an extension of this theological motif, they differ from the theology of the Christian Reformed churches at bottom only *in degree.* Hence the common Christian Reformed criticism, for example, of Hoeksema is simply that "he goes too far," and "emphasizes election too much." The criticism that vigorous defenders of 1924 are emphasizing common grace "too much" is but another expression of this basic relativism. The basic difference being but a matter of degrees, the theological debate between Hoeksema and Van Til and the Christian Reformed Church has not come and cannot hope to come to any clear-cut conclusions.

The criticism to which the theology shaped by this theological motif is open is that it failed to follow carefully the example of the Apostle Paul. Paul did not regard history as a mere process of discrimination between elect and reprobate. Nor did he cut down the gospel of God's grace to fit the size and shape of sin and reprobation. He neither explained Israel's unbelief in terms of reprobation nor did he restrictively determine his conception of the gospel to fit the fact of their unbelief. On the contrary, we hear him ask, "For, what if some were without faith? Shall their want of faith make of none effect the faithfulness of God? God forbid" Had heed been given to this Pauline methodology the fact that some men are not saved would not have been given in Reformed theology a preponderance nor would it have elicited a fascination that it does not deserve.

* * *

The classic example of this fascination with the complex of sin and reprobation and the attempt to account for it in terms of God's sovereignty, was the Infra-Supra-lapsarian controversy. The issue was whether God's sovereign will to election and reprobation is logically prior to His will as it relates to sin, or logically posterior. If logically prior then reprobation can be explained apart from sin, and sin is explainable in terms of the sovereign will to reprobation. In simplest terms, God's sovereignty of and by itself wholly accounts for, and thus is the explanation of, sin and reprobation — as well as of election. This is the supra-lapsarian position. Although the creeds of the Church are explicitly "infra," the motif of the central doctrine was so regnant that being "infra" was something less than theologically respectable. The "infra" position contains a deep-seated motif of refusal to account for sin, and reprobation (and election) apart from sin by means of mere sovereignty *as such.* Inasmuch as the methodology and spirit of infra- and supra-lapsarianism are so diverse as scarcely to permit the two positions to dwell in comfort and peace under the same ecclesiastical roof, it is indicative of the power which the lure of the central doctrine enjoyed that the whole issue ended in a compromise in which supralapsarianism was officially granted equal rights and respectability in the church.

The points to be observed are these: each party to the controversy began with the acceptance of the sovereignty of God as its "central doctrine"; each was committed to the explanation of all other doctrines, including sin and reprobation, in terms of this sovereignty, the "supra" in a positive, and the "infra" in a negative manner. Consequently, the "infra" could not hope to win the day since the "supra" was merely carrying the basic theological motif a little further than the "infra" cared to carry it. Infralapsarianism could hardly be expected to overcome a position which simply laid claim to greater consistency.

What was the actual achievement of this controversy? It granted official sanction for the "supra's" extension of the old theological motif to account for all other truths in terms of the accepted "central doctrine" of divine sovereignty. It provided a larger basis for the theologies of both Hoeksema and Van Til, in which the old motif is carried even further. For the rest the whole controversy achieved little — if indeed anything at all. A controversy said to have shaken the church to its foundations is now, except among the followers of Hoeksema and Van Til, regarded as something of small consequence. As far as orthodoxy today is concerned it makes not one iota of difference whether layman or clergyman is the one or the other. Even a theological professor draws no discredit upon himself by refusing to indicate his personal position.

* * *

A second illustration of this type of theological self-reflection upon the accepted central doctrine can be discerned in the manner in which the counsel of God was defined. The method which made sovereignty as such the explanation of sin and reprobation, as well as election, was applied to the counsel of God. Sovereignty *per se* was now made the explanation of everything, of "whatsoever comes to pass." Just as sovereignty was reduced to a philosophic concept of causality which made God as sovereign the Ultimate Cause of sin and reprobation, as well as of election, so divine sovereignty was made the Ultimate Cause of whatsoever comes to pass, and whatsoever comes to pass became the Ultimate Expression of God's Ultimate Will. Thus each item in "whatsoever comes to pass," that is, of God's counsel, becomes equally expressive of God's sovereignty and equally revelatory of His will. In such a conception of God's counsel, it should be observed, nothing is central, nothing peripheral; nothing primary, nothing secondary and subsidiary. As reprobation and election are regarded as equally expressive of God's sovereignty and will, so now every item in God's counsel is made equally revelatory of God's sovereignty and will. In such a conception of God's counsel no item can be defeated by another, and none triumph over another. As actualized in history, there can be no genuine historical tensions, no real historical defeats and no genuine historical events of triumph, since everything is equally willed by God and equally expressive of His sovereignty. Christ himself is simply one item among many items, no more revelatory of divine sovereignty and the divine will than any other item. Stated in terms of history, God's will and sovereignty is no more adequately expressed at the Resurrection than at the Fall! Christ's victory over sin and death is no more revelatory of what the New Testament means by "Lordship" than is the defeat of the Yankees by the Chicago White Sox.

It is no accidental matter that it is a principle of the apologetics of those who espouse this view that the slightest error at one point in a man's thought system is classified as a basic error and a fundamental departure from truth. When every item of history is regarded as of equal importance, there are no slight errors or peripheral matters. When everything is absolutized, absolutism is demanded.

From this simplistic conception of God's counsel some very simplisitc theological definitions were deduced. Human responsibility, for example, was defined by Herman Hoeksema simply as the necessity of man's response to God. The ethical notion that man ought to make the *right* response did not enter into the definition. In a similarly simplistic manner man's fall into sin was sometimes explained. The Fall was simply regarded as another item in God's all-inclusive plan. It was then said that the ultimate truth about the Fall is that God was its Ultimate Cause. This was even said to be of the very essence of the Reformed faith, and the contention that Adam was created with the freedom and possibility of not sinning was assayed as heresy. The procedure of defining other doctrines in the light of the accepted central doctrine rather than in the light of the Bible, or in the light of the Bible only as reflected in the central doctrine rather than in its direct rays, can be observed at many points where the Bible was obliged to say only what the central doctrine allowed. The biblical teaching that God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked was restricted to the elect-wicked. The divine love of John 3:16 is another illustrative case in point. Under the heavy hand of the central doctrine, this love was restricted to the elect-world. Others who denied this nonetheless urged the illegitimacy of the indiscriminate assertion, God loves you. Thus there arose the anomalous situation in which ministers were hesitant about preaching on John 3:16, while children in Sunday School and in mission field and chapel were being taught to sing: "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

When this method was employed to interpret the doctrine of the covenant, the consequences were

highly significant. It was again the reprobate who constituted the problem, and the task was conceived as that of understanding the covenant with reference to him. A confusion of answers emerged. For some the reprobate was *in* the covenant in terms of law, but not in terms of life. For others he was not in the covenant at all, but only *under* its administration. In the former view the reprobate had a *legal* right to the promise of the covenant. For the late Professor Heyns, this legal right of the reprobate included a legal right to God's saving grace. In the latter view, the promise was not for the reprobate at all. The point to be observed is that in both views the covenant was tapered down to fit the fact of the reprobate and the end of the discussion produced not greater clarity but greater confusion.

Out of this confusion and disagreement over covenantal grace, the common grace issue emerged. On the premise of the sovereign nature of God and His grace, Herman Hoeksema urged that the reprobate is not in the covenant and therefore not the recipient of any covenantal grace or promise. To extend grace to the reprobate, to make the covenant promise conditional and the gospel an offer to the reprobate (or even to the elect) was, he contended, to Arminianize grace, that is, to deprive it of its sovereign character. Sovereignty meant that God does not offer but works grace in the elect and, in reference to the reprobate, that God withholds His grace from them and has for them only wrath and curse. Hoeksema urged that this sovereign character of grace is supported by what for him seemed axiomatic and obvious truth, that God loves only the elect *because they are righteous* in Christ, and that God hates the sinner. One would think that the Christian Reformed churches would have seen this wide crack in Hoeksema's armor, for if God loves the elect because they are righteous and hates sinners because they are sinners, then grace itself has been lost. Their failure to challenge Hoeksema's position that God as sovereign can only hate any and every sinner as sinner, is one of the most puzzling enigmas in the theological history of these churches. While they rightly insisted that there is a divine grace for the sinner, any sinner, their failure to detect the more basic issue accounts for the fact that, although they for the first time in the history of the Christian Church made the acceptance of common grace official and binding, they insisted that common grace does not save, without adequately indicating how anything can be called grace that does not in some sense save. Their failure also accounts for the continued insistence, even after 1924, that it is un-Reformed to assert indiscriminately, "God loves you." Their failure to challenge Hoeksema's very conception of grace was caused by the fact that, like Hoeksema himself, their thought was more preoccupied with the idea of sovereignty than with the idea of grace so that while they rightly insisted that there is a grace of God for all men, their formulation in respect of clarity left much to be desired. A clear formulation of common grace could hardly be expected at a time when theological perception was such that a challenge to the very nature of grace went unobserved. The failure to perceive this defect in Hoeksema's theological construction still persists even today and accounts for the fact that the greater part of the theological leadership of the Christian Reformed churches does not perceive that the late Professor Schilder's position that God loves men as creatures but not as sinners, and Professor Van Til's position that God loves mankind only as an undifferentiated generality but not as individualized sinners, are positions which have also lost sight of the nature of God's grace. They have not yet detected that although the specifics of formulation differ, Hoeksema, Schilder, and Van Til all insist on the proposition that God as sovereign does not, and cannot, love a sinner; and that this is in fact, though not by intent, a denial of the very nature of divine grace, of grace of any kind.

The point to be observed is that the whole controversy, of the past and of the present, whether viewed from one side or the other, was carried on within and determined by the terms of the long-standing accepted central doctrine of God's sovereignty as it relates to the elect and reprobate. What was and is new is the manner in which this sovereignty was related to grace, particularly as grace relates to the reprobate. The man who is not saved continues to be the problem. The doctrinal formulation of 1924 is correct in essence in its insistence that there is a love and grace of God for sinners. It preserves the biblical nature of grace. Yet the very nature of its formulation indicates that it was constructed under the motif of the "central doctrine," and its content provided Hoeksema with some ground to contend that it was a theological departure, for the form and content are at variance. Thus the final development of the highly abstract doctrine of sovereignty led to the Protestant Reformed denial of common grace, and within these churches, in the area of the pulpit, to schism over the question whether the grace of the gospel is *conditional.* Within the Christian Reformed churches it led to the new and first-time official affirmation of common grace, a position which within these churches is treated as a matter of indifference, or even of irritation, an irritation which when articulate urges that although the doctrine of common grace is true enough to warrant the deposition of those who deny it, it must not be affirmed "too much." To defend this truth

igorously is to give it "too much emphasis" and o render one suspect of liberalism.

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The end result of this long development of the heological motif of the central doctrine can hardly e said to have produced theological clarity. In he Christian Reformed Church, for example, it is prerequisite to orthodoxy to hold that the gospel s an offer of grace, and on the other hand it is regarded as an indication of being un-Reformed to ay indiscriminately, "God loves you." And to nention no more, it is a matter of orthodoxy to hold that covenant children occupy a unique position, et it can be said (and has been), without fear f contradiction, that the non-covenant child under he hearing of the gospel is the recipient of the ame promise of salvation as the covenant child. n view of this theological confusion produced by hat long theological preoccupation with the sover-ignty of God, particularly as it relates to the reprobate, it is small wonder that the doctrine of he covenant, the "infra-supra" issue, and the doctrine of reprobation and election receive some-thing less than a vital interest in the pulpit and actual life of the churches. The end of the whole development has produced a confusion which breeds indifference and apathy. When we consider the small achievements and the large confusion that have come out of the various controversies over infra- and supralapsarians, over the covenant, over common grace and the general offer of the gospel, it is not surprising that the Church as a whole wants no more theological controversy and even shies away from theological discussion.

None of these matters, including the most recent of 1924, seems to have captured the serious interest of the Christian Reformed churches. The call to the churches to continue research into the matter of common grace has gone almost unheeded. Theological exhaustion and confusion, with resultant theological indifference, have combined to bring the processes of theological reflection to an end. After many years the theological discussion carried on under the aegis of the sovereignty of God as it relates to the problem of sin and reprobation has run its course. It appears that the possibility of theological progress within the terms of this point of departure has come to an end. Such theological discussion as is carried on at present would seem to be but a futile and fruitless attempt to carry the exhausted theological process forward. Though dark and sinister charges of heresy are sometimes raised, they are greeted with a general apathy and indifference on the part of the Church. The Church seems to sense that in this area of theological abstractionism, heresy and orthodoxy are one and the same. This perhaps accounts for the fact that neither the claim to orthodoxy in this area elicits gratitude, nor the charge of heresy, concern.

We stand at a point of theological exhaustion and inertia. While none of the leadership of the Christian Reformed Church denies election or reprobation, or repudiates the doctrines of the covenant or of common grace, these doctrines can hardly be said to receive vital treatment in either theological forum or church pulpit. When they are discussed, the discussion is dispirited; the sound is rather like that of an unpleasant echo of a past that is better forgotten, than of a living voice. When preached, they appear to bear little structural connection with the pulpit's general theology. Once discussed with vigor, and once regarded as crucial to orthodox theology, they seem today to have largely lost their power to claim the interest of the mind and the concern of the heart. Nowhere in the Church are they denied. Yet frequently they are used more as slogans than as living doctrines. It is to be feared, for example, that the doctrine of the covenant is used more as a slogan for the promotion of Christian schools than as a doctrine carrying a commitment of the heart. Nowhere, it seems, are these doctrines held with burning conviction, studied with passion, preached with warmth and vigor. They have suffered from the theological treatment they have received, and are treated largely like an aged, unwanted relative, neither loved nor disowned.

The long conducted theological quest to account for sin and reprobation in the light of divine sovereignty drained out of the above-mentioned doctrines so much of their vitality and life that they are today more tolerated than believed. That these doctrines which once commended the spirited interest of the churches, and at times even divided them, should now lie in general disinterest and disuse was inevitable. Theology has no life in itself. It is only when it returns again and again to the living Word that it can draw upon the springs of life. The churches in general care little, by virtue of a Spirit-endowed intuition, for finely spun theological speculations, and treat them with a Spirit-wrought indifference, even when they are attended with the claim of orthodoxy or the charge of heresy. Our theology must stand again in the direct light of the Scripture in order to see new light and in order continually to appraise the truth of her formulations.

Instead of accepting so uncritically a central doctrine as a point of departure for the understanding of all other doctrines, the theology of the Christian Reformed churches would have fared better and lived more intensely had it returned again and again to fix its attention upon the Scrip-

tures. Had this been done the sovereignty of God would have been understood less abstractly and more intimately and concretely in terms of the Lordship of Christ, which is to say, in terms of God's Elect, rather than in terms of election and reprobation abstractly understood apart from Christ. Had this been done the theology which resulted from past theological discussions would not have suffered that distortion which stemmed directly from the error of making the sovereignty of reprobation equally definitive with an equally abstract sovereignty of election. Had Christ been given "pre-eminence in all things," He would then have been recognized as the central truth of Scripture, as the center of God's counsel, as the supreme revelation of God's ultimate will, and therefore as the Truth in reference to which other doctrines must be seen and understood.

The Triumph of Staticism

A theology constructed by the method described above is inevitably a static theology; static not merely in the sense that the processes of theological reflection come to an end, but also in the sense that staticism is an inherent characteristic of the theology thus constructed. As we look back over the processes of our theological reflection, the specter of staticism is frequently seen. The covenant, for example, was constantly urged as an *eternal* covenant, yet in such a manner that its eternality was not effectively combined with its temporal and historical establishment. Consequently, Paul's insistence that the Gentiles were once upon a time outside the covenant, and the significance which he attributes to this fact, found no effective place in these discussions. Similarly, Christ himself found no central place in these discussions, since Christ can only be understood in reference to the whole temporal-historical history of revelation. Since the covenant was conceived in such abstract eternal terms, the covenant was not so much preached as lectured upon. Indeed, it was not regarded so much as something to preach, as a structure within which Reformed teaching was to take place. Indeed, in the Protestant Reformed churches where the intention was to truly preach the covenant, it was preaching itself that became a problem, and in the end preaching became merely a kind of announcement. Even in the Christian Reformed Church, where grace and salvation could be offered, the covenant was not usually regarded as the proper theme of preaching in a mission station. An eternal covenant statically conceived could at best only be preached within the church, or at worst, only announced to the church. The covenant was not offered to the sinner, it being regarded as so "eternal" as not to call for a decision to enter it. The covenant was regarded as at each moment eternal, so that the establishment of the covenant in history was regarded simply as a repetition of divine actions in successive moments. In this repetition of divine actions in successive moments, no moment of establishment (for example, the moment of Abraham or the moment of Gentile entrance) was any more (or less!) significant than any other moment (for instance, the moment of Christ).

The specter of staticism is singularly evident in the matter of election. Election was spoken of (quite rightly) as *eternal* election, yet in such a manner that its eternality was not meaningfully related to the biblical teachings that Christ is God's Elect and that our election takes place *in* Christ. In his discussion of election in his *Systematic Theology,* Berkhof, for example, makes but passing reference to Christ as God's Elect, and presents no discussion whatever of the truth that election takes place in Christ — though he does discuss its eternal, non-temporal character. If, indeed, election takes place, as Paul says, "in Christ," then election is no more and no less eternal than Christ, and we should be as willing to speak of an eternal Christ as of eternal election. Yet it is significant that men frequently spoke of the latter but rarely of the former. In the interest of protecting the sovereignty of God as expressed in election and reprobation men seized on the eternality of election and reprobation, with the strange consequence that the idea of eternality implied in the assertion that God "chose us in him from before the foundations of the world" played a tremendous role, while the same idea of eternality implied in the assertion that "Christ was crucified from before the foundations of the world" played no significant role at all. Throughout the whole long development of the central doctrine of the sovereignty of God as expressed in election and reprobation, eternality was attributed particularly to election and reprobation. This was done in order, of course, to protect the sovereignty of grace by showing that man's salvation does not depend upon what man does in time. Yet the nobleness of this intent did not justify the procedure of allowing the eternality of election to play a dominating role over the eternality of God's love and grace, and over the eternality of a crucifixion accomplished before the foundations of the world. Such an *eternalizing* of eternal election, even though done for a noble purpose, introduced a pervasive staticism into the Reformed theology of pulpit and academic hall.

This procedure of simply explaining everything with reference to an eternal election and reprobation prevented Reformed theology from discovering, and even today prevents it from bringing under tribute

eschatological character of the gospel. Had s eschatological character of the gospel as a word both judgment and grace been understood, 1924 uld not *merely* have insisted that the preaching the gospel is an offer of grace. This staticism o kept Reformed theological reflection from ognizing the truths, so important to Paul, that gospel is for the "Jew first," and that Israel s a special function in the present, and in the ture, in God's program of world redemption. The tic character of Reformed thinking simply could t make room for the idea of "first" and "second," historical sequence.

The same specter of staticism appears in that stract and static conception of the antithesis hich is so much in the mind of the Christian Reformed Church today, according to which the world eternally divided into eternally warring halves gaged in an eternal conflict in which there is victory because no decisive battle is ever waged. his conception of the antithesis is wholly static cause it is defined apart from Christ and His torious death and resurrection. Indeed, in this ew Christ is merely the executive of this antithesis, t the Savior of the world who abolishes death, ts the devil at naught, and takes away the sin the world.

The same staticism looms up in that concept God's counsel in which each item is of equal portance, equally revelatory of God's sovereignty d will; and hence no item triumphs over other ems so that one item constitutes the center of od's counsel and is the central expression of God's vereignty and will. On the basis of this static nception of God's counsel it has been urged that an's most perverse ethical actions are, in their ery abnormality, an "authoritative" revelation of od. And it is significant of the health of our eology today that the claim can be pressed that is is eminently Reformed, without eliciting a hallenge.

The presence of the same unhealthy staticism is vident from the many writings where "sinner" nd "unregenerate" are regarded as synonymous, ow with the elect, now with the reprobate. The tatement "God hates the wicked" is a slogan in oeksema's writings — as though the elect are ot and never were wicked, as though Christ came o call something other than sinners, and had died or us while we were yet something other than nemies! One meets the same staticism in many iscussions about the Church and the World, discussions which suggest that those who constitute he Church were never in and of the world, and as hough none of those now in and of the world vill ever enter into and become the Church.

Theological Neutralism

We have seen that the accepted "central doctrine" was the sovereignty of God defined in reference to election and reprobation. The ultimate explanation of saved and lost, heaven and hell, sin and righteousness, or in brief, the salvation of the elect and the damnation of the reprobate was simply: sovereignty. Yet it was not always observed that a sovereignty which *in and of and by itself* explains both sin and righteousness, election and reprobation, is a sovereignty without any essential ethical character. Such sovereignty is an unqualified, naked power, a brute fact.

The use of the concept of sovereignty as naked power is frequently discernible in our theological writings of the past. When it was used, it was frequently at very crucial points. It is discernible in those discussions of God's sovereignty where God is described as "The Absolute" and is reduced to a kind of philosophical category of Causality. It appears where God is said to be the Ultimate Cause of sin and evil. It appears where election and reprobation are asserted to be wholly commensurate, or equally ultimate, as in Van Til, and it appears no less plainly in Hoeksema's thought, where this commensurability is denied on the ground that reprobation is in order to election but where it is nonetheless present as the working presupposition of his whole theology. This idea of sovereignty as naked power appeared in a recent criticism of Professor Berkouwer by Hoeksema in which Hoeksema defended the concept of God as Absolute Power or Causality, and in terms of God defined as Absolute Power presented a *single* definition of election and reprobation, that is, a definition which was equally definitive of *both* election and reprobation. It lies concealed in Hoeksema's insistence that reprobation is for God himself an absolute necessity; it lies naked in his conception of human responsibility, which he defines in terms of bare necessity but not in terms of what is ethically right and wrong. It appears shockingly in his admission that God is indeed a "terrible (*vreselijk*) God." It also appears clearly in Van Til's concept of grace, for in his thought grace in and of itself, that is, by virtue of its very nature, is equally adapted to the production and actualization of elect and reprobate. It appears in his contention that common grace, as he says, "in itself" and "simultaneously and progressively" is a mercy of God upon the elect and is the wrath of God upon the non-elect that he may crucify the Son of God afresh. Here the concept of grace is as neutral as the bare sovereignty it expresses. It appears baldly in his insistence that God as He is in Himself is the Ultimate Cause of sin and evil. It appears in his insistence that reprobation is to be explained in terms of God without any reference to

sin. It appears in his insistence upon a "non-relational theology" in which God as the self-contained Trinity is said to be Himself the cause and explanation of everything good and bad. The presence of this bare sovereignty is also betrayed in the simplistic conception of God's counsel described above. Its presence is thinly veiled where the creation of Adam *posse non peccavi* and the possibility of Adam's not sinning is explicitly denied. It is scarcely veiled at all in the position that the gospel *as such* is a blessing for the elect and a curse for the non-elect. This ethically neutral sovereignty of naked power and causality is hidden in the background of that crass conception of the immutability of God which urges that God is utterly unmoved and untouched either by the sin or plight of man the sinner. And to mention no more, it is clearly apparent in the common idea of the antithesis in which the world is eternally divided into two worlds in eternal conflict, and in what is not unrelated to this, in Hoeksema's position that God's single will is an antithetical will, which though it is expressive of God's Being, equally accounts for sin and grace, life and death, salvation and damnation.

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Much of what has been said above is particularly characteristic of the theologies of Hoeksema and/or Van Til. Nevertheless it was necessary to make this analysis. First, because a theological evaluation of the Christian Reformed churches which looks back over the years cannot ignore the fact that both of these men came out of the Christian Reformed churches; and, historically at least, their theologies came out of the theological tradition of these churches. Secondly, and this is equally significant — and indicates the validity of the first reason — the theologies of each with their particular motifs have found and still find considerable sympathy, and have exerted and still do exert considerable influence in Christian Reformed thinking — facts most true where most denied. In the simplest terms: both theologians have operated on the basic theological motif of the sovereignty of God as defined in election and reprobation, and have followed the theological method of seeking to make all other doctrines conform to sovereignty thus defined. The theologies of both are what they are because both have applied the theological method more consistently, and carried the theological process further, than the Christian Reformed Church has been willing to go. Hence the general criticism is "they go too far." Paying greater attention to scriptural teaching than either, the Christian Reformed Church has in its official positions refused to capitulate to a theology built on the concept of an ethically neutral, naked sovereignty. It has been less "logical," less "consistent," and therefore less systematic. Hence it has accused Hoeksema of rati[o]alism, and Hoeksema has accused Christian [R]formed theology of irrationalism and at points [of] nonsense.

A Set of Mind

The method by which the Christian Reform[ed] Church has avoided the theological extremes [of] Hoeksema and Van Til is by the acceptance of wh[at] is commonly called the apparent paradoxes or c[on]tradictions of Scripture. The Christian Reform[ed] Church speaks of two divine wills (a secret and [re]vealed) whereas Hoeksema posits one (antithetic[al] will; she posits two graces, common and spec[ial] whereas Hoeksema knows but one; she posits [a] well-meaning gospel offer to any and all, wher[eas] Hoeksema has a gospel which is good news for [the] elect only. The acceptance of pairs of terms to [de]fine a single religious magnitude is, of course, qu[ite] in the Reformed tradition, where we find gene[ral] and special revelation, revealed and secret w[ill], special and common grace, general and special pr[o]idence, inner and outer call, covenant as legal-[ar]rangement and covenant as life-arrangement. By [the] serious acceptance of such pairs of concepts for t[he] understanding and defining of religious realiti[es] and by the firm repudiation of any interpretat[ion] which in effect dissolves one of the concepts, t[he] Christian Reformed Church has saved itself fr[om] the extreme positions of Hoeksema and Van Til.

This is not the place to evaluate the validity [of] any or all of these sets of dual terms. I wish on[ly] to observe that the employment of such pairs [of] terms has produced not only what is common[ly] called a "balanced theology." It has also created [a] distinct set or pattern of mind which has become [so] too characteristic of our Christian Reformed me[n]tality. The peculiar characteristic of this mind [is] that it claims to hold to both aspects of a truth a[nd] yet in practice quite painlessly holds to the one a[nd] rejects the other. This kind of mind accepts co[n]tradictions (real or apparent) with great facili[ty] but with an equal facility in actual practice affir[ms] the one and denies the other as the demands of e[x]pediency, the sound of battle, private desire, or i[n]stitutional interests dictate. This has been a gre[at] detriment to the health and advance of our theolog[y]. The obvious symptom of the presence of this u[n]healthy mentality is the fact that it is exceeding[ly] difficult to know at many points what the Christi[an] Reformed Church really believes.

I here cite a few illustrations. We are on pri[n]ciple committed to non-church schools, and earne[st]ly plead the principle on the level of primary a[nd] secondary education. Yet on the college level w[e] earnestly plead the opposite principle and even su[p]port the inconsistency by urging that a churc[h] school is a right and duty that stems from the ve[ry]

ture and task of the Church, or, as more recently, m our own subjective religious concern. Orthoxy and heresy seem to be a matter of time and cumstance; for if Modernism proclaims a unirsal fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man, en it is heretical for the orthodox to employ the ms even with their biblical meaning. Election d common grace are true, but become untrue if ressed and emphasized. Being the Word of God, e New Testament is normative for the life and actice of the Church, yet its teaching and example lative to the acceptance and baptism of converts not normative for us of the twentieth century. hat is said to be of the very essence of the gospel, the distinctive features of the Reformed Faith, ust be preached vigorously in the pulpit, but need t be mentioned on the mission field or station. he man in the pulpit may not declare indiscrimately, "God loves you," but the missionary teachthe pagan children that Jesus loves them and the ble tells them so. The churches are taught that fants of the covenant (elect or not) "as members his (Christ's) church ought to be baptised," and at "believers, all and everyone, as members of hrist, are partakers of him and of all his treasures d gifts," yet the churches are also taught that r own converts whom the Lord has added to His hurch need not be accepted and granted the gift baptism unless they meet additional standards yond that of being a genuine convert. Because of e impurity of doctrine and practice of other hurches we believe we have a right to our separate xistence, yet at the same time we grant them an qual right of existence. Covenant children are niquely related to the covenant promise, but nonovenant children who hear the gospel are in the ame unique position. We urge Bible study but reard the man who thinks to have discovered new iblical light as theologically suspect. We urge hat the position of the Reformed Church of Amera on lodges was one of the important reasons for ur withdrawal from that Church in 1857. Yet toay we have a Synodical committee studying the uestion of closer affiliation with a denomination, a enomination with which we already exchange fraernal delegates, which on the question of lodges as the same official position as that of the Reormed Church of America. Illustrations could be ited if not *ad infinitum* at least *ad nauseam,* but hese suffice to indicate the presence of the kind of nind which can think one thing and do another vith great facility and ease. The results of this ind of mind in large measure account for the fact hat on many scores it is quite impossible to learn ust what the Christian Reformed churches believe. t also accounts for the large indifference of the verage member to what is written in the official r free religious press. Many a member has learned over the years that a voice that shifts from one side of an issue to the other does not make for informative reading, and consequently under an unconscious self-imposed censure limits his reading to trios and calls, and the obituary column.

This is not to suggest that we should repudiate all such pairs of terms in our theological thinking. But it is to suggest that we have developed a careless and dangerous habit of granting theoretical commitment to two opposing positions and in practice pursuing the one of choice. Indeed, it appears at times to be a sufficient warrant for a given position to insist that one also believes the opposite. We have I think developed a set of mind which finds it easy to be at times less than intellectually honest, with the result that we hold many positions without conviction. This is both unwholesome for the spiritual life of the Church and detrimental to the recapture of sound theological health.

Subservience to Institutionalism

Closely related to the above is another factor that has operated to the detriment of our theological health. Theological advance has frequently been stifled by an unwholesome institutionalism, which makes the denominational institution primary and reduces theology to something secondary and subservient to institutionalism. This regard for the institution, coupled with a fear of everything that seems to threaten it, accounts for many things in our churches. Our ecclesiastical concern with education, not for the sake of education but for the sake of denominational institutionalism, is a case in point. This subservience of school to church accounts for the widely held position that Christian schools are built only for our own children and enrollment should be limited to them. It also accounts for the widely used arguments that the denomination may own its own college because this promotes denominational unity and loyalty. Finally, it also accounts for the popularity and effectiveness of the theologically indefensible slogan "as the school goes, so goes the church." A misdirected loyalty for ecclesiastical institutionalism is quite willing to compel educational institutions to serve the ends of a churchly institutionalism in spite of the damage and limitations it places upon them as institutions of education. It is no secret that our Christian schools are not making any great educational progress, but this obstacle to progress will remain as long as the psychology prevails that our schools exist for the sake of our churches.

This same exultation of institutionalism can be clearly seen in the prevailing thought respecting the reception of converts and, of late, the reception of newly organized mission churches. In 1934 Synod distributed and urged the churches to study its instructions on how to carry on Reformed evange-

lization. These instructions said regarding converts unwilling to agree with our position on worldly amusements, "let no one regret that the kind of person in question does not care for our churches. He is either no Christian at all, or he is the kind of Christian that we can well afford to be without." This attitude of "being well able to do without" those of our own converts who do not measure up to our institutional standards, is an attitude plainly more concerned with institutional self-preservation than with the desire to be the Church of Christ. The wide-spread tendency in our churches to settle the question of membership in terms of institutional self-interest, rather than in terms of a sound theology of the nature of the Church, is a sad indication that even theology is compelled to serve this unwarranted institutionalism, or remain silent. Yet theology no more than education can flourish when it is made the slave of mere institutionalism.

It is this over-riding institutionalism with all its self-interest and self-concern which keeps us isolated from the theological movements of our times and prevents us from being a church with a genuine sense of missions. At various points in our behavior it is evident that we are more concerned with protecting the future of our denominational institution than concerned with being the Apostolic Church with an Apostolic witness to and for the world. This spells strangulation for theology. There is possibility for theological growth and advance only when the Church lives out of a sense of deep involvement in, and responsibility for, her world and her times. For all mere institutionalism stands under the judgment that whatsoever would save its life shall lose it.

A Sign of Hope

There is no possibility that our Church's theology will come alive by simple resolve. Dynamic theologies are not born by resolutions. Nor is there even a slender possibility that we shall experience a theological renaissance by becoming aware of our theological plight. Neither will the justifiable fear that we shall soon become just another typical American church, evangelical but theologically colorless, produce the resurgence of the theological interest and research we so desperately need. Not all our hopes and fears, nor any of our resolutions and theological conferences, will produce the theological awakening required.

Theology can no more thrive when a church lives abstractly withdrawn from life, than it can when it follows an abstract theological method. Only when a church lives in sympathetic and responsible rapport with her environment can it flourish. Theologies are not manufactured in ivory towers or academic classrooms. They are wrought in the very heart and lifebeat of the Church, and the Chur lives vitally and responsibly only on that bord line where she confronts the world with her gosp Here she is sensitive to her environment. Here s is moved by compassion to look again into t Word to obtain something for her neighbor in need. Where there is no sense of mission for t world, there theology quickly atrophies. On the co trary, a church which is sensitive to a lost world men in need and executes its mission for the wor will discover that its theology gains life and vitali

Our church is beginning to discover her missi for the world, and is becoming increasingly sen tive to her surroundings. If this new missiona concern grows, extending its outreach, there is ho that our theology will again come alive. In the pa we have lived largely in isolation without a sense mission. It is no accident, and the matter ought be observed, that the theologies we have produc in the past have themselves lacked passion and ha failed to generate missionary impulse and zeal. the analysis in the earlier part of this article correct, then our academic preoccupation with t problem of the reprobate may go a long way towa explaining the absence both of theological passi and missionary zeal. In any case, a new sense mission is emerging today.

It is not emerging, to be sure, without stress a strain. Our most disturbing problems, it should observed, are arising on that borderline betwe Church and world where the new sense of missi asserts itself. It is at this point, both at home a abroad, but especially at home, that the disturbi questions about conditions of church membersh are emerging. During the time we did little or mission work, we could easily be proud of hi quality membership, proud that no lodge membe no Sunday fisherman or grass-cutter, no worldl minded people given to worldly amusements, we members of our churches. At that time we cou say that we could afford to do without such Chri tians, if indeed they be Christians at all. But if is true that a church may not turn away its ow converts and may not reject those whom the Lo Himself. has added to her fellowship, and if it true that converts "as members of His Church oug to be baptized," then we will have to re-examine th theological basis of some of our time-honored pos tions and practices. We shall then have to re-e amine our theology of the Church, to rediscover th nature and task of the Church of Christ. We sha then take seriously the Heidelberg Catechism teaching that the Church is a "communion saints," that is, "that believers, all and every one, a members of Christ, are partakers of him and of a his treasures and gifts." We shall then practice th truth, lest we deny in practice that we are th Church. Had we in the past lived on this borde

ine of responsible sensitivity, we would already have faced these questions as they confronted us in the Ecumenical Movement, and as they confront us now in our centennial celebration of our secession from the Reformed Church of America in 1857. For this we were neither willing nor prepared. We ignored the Ecumenical Movement, or merely reacted negatively: we celebrated one hundred years of God's care and blessing, but said little or nothing in celebration of the actual event of secession. But the impulse of missions is now upon us and it will confront us with essentially the same problems, disturbing as they may be. The attempt will be made, indeed is being made, to settle these new problems and to answer these new questions by a simple reference to what we have always done in the past, but it is not likely that such basic questions as have to do with the reception, baptism, and membership of our own mission converts will be thus settled. Concretely faced with these problems our basic Christianity will, I believe, triumph, and true converts will not be excluded from our membership, even though it involves the cost of surrendering some of our traditional viewpoints. The very agitation and disturbance will, I think, thrust us Bibleward to again search the Scriptures for clearer light on the theological doctrines and problems which become an issue in our execution of the mission of Christ. As the crisis came in the Protestant Reformed churches in the area of preaching and pulpit, it will come in our churches, as it is already coming, in the area of mission preaching. And what a host of problems emerge at the borderline where the Church meets the world with her gospel that is the power of God unto salvation! Here the problems of the nature and task of the Church, the question of church membership conditions, the question of baptism, the question of election, of the covenant, of gospel preaching, of an offer of salvation, all emerge, not as academic questions that can be dealt with in an abstract manner, but as existential questions, as vital and as urgent as the salvation of a lost soul! For while theologians can lose themselves in preoccupation with the theological problems posited by the reprobate, the living faith of the Church's more ordinary members is impelled to a sense of concern for lost sinners.

Our new and growing sense of mission is, I think, our brightest hope for a theological rebirth and a return to sound theological health. At the borderline we may gain a new and profoundly exhilarating understanding of the fact that the greatest theologian of the New Testament was also her greatest missionary. Paul was not the former without being the latter! For the theology of Paul is above all else a missionary theology. Which is but to say, it was not the theology of some "central doctrine," but a theology of Jesus Christ.

Great Empires of West Africa

By Harry R. Boer

ON MARCH 6 OF THIS YEAR the Gold Coast, a former British West African colony, became independent under the official name of Ghana. It is a name reminiscent of past greatness. When Prime Minister Nkrumah made his speech in the Gold Coast legislature moving national independence, he said,

> In the very early days of the Christian era, long before England had assumed any importance, long even before her people had united into a nation, our ancestors had attained a great empire, which lasted until the eleventh century, when it fell before the attacks of the Moors of the North. At its height that empire stretched from Timbuktu to Bamako, and even as far as the Atlantic. It is said that lawyers and scholars were much respected in that empire and that the inhabitants of Ghana wore garments of wool, cotton, silk and velvet. There was trade in copper, gold and textile fabrics, and jewels and weapons of gold and silver were carried.
>
> Thus may we take pride in the name of Ghana, not out of romanticism, but as an inspiration for the future. It is right and proper that we should know about our past. For just as the future moves from the present so the present has emerged from the past. Nor need we be ashamed of our past. There was much in it of glory.

That West Africa has in its history periods not devoid of greatness is known to few. Our education has been so centered on Europe, on her Graeco-Roman roots, and on her extensions in the Americas and elsewhere, that we have only a passing knowledge of the great empires of antiquity such as Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, and Persia; considerably less of the civilizations of India, China, Japan, and Southeast Asia, and virtually none at all of those that flourished in Mexico, South America, and in parts of Africa. Now the world is turning its eyes to Africa as never before. This raises the question, What is this Africa? Has it a significant history? Is it more than a continent just emerging from barbarism? Is there anything in its history which raises legitimate expectations of future African greatness?

In this article we can do no more than take the merest glimpse at Africa as it once was. In doing

so we limit ourselves to West Africa, that is, to that area which is bordered in the north by the Sahara, in the west and south by the Atlantic, and in the east by a line running roughly from Lake Chad southward through the Cameroons to the southeastern point of Nigeria. It so happens that in the Africa south of the Sahara, this section saw the greatest development of civilization and empire now known to students of African history.

Ghana

West Africa has been molded from early in the Christian era to the present by forces issuing from the impact of non-Negroes upon Negroes. The non-Negroes who have helped to make West Africa what it has been and is — for better and for worse — are Jews, Berbers, Arabs, and Europeans — and about in that order chronologically. Putting it otherwise, we can say that during the past eighteen centuries the negro Hamites of West Africa have been impinged upon with varying degrees of intensity by non-negro Hamites (Berbers), by Semites (Jews and Arabs), and by Japhethites (Europeans, notably the Portuguese, the Dutch, the British, and the French). Again limiting our article, we shall at this time deal only with the influence of the Berbers, the Jews, and the Arabs.

Sometime in the second century a group of non-Negroes coming from the north through the western Sahara settled in a place called Aukar, which was situated just below the lower edge of the desert and about five hundred and fifty miles east from the Atlantic coast. These people may have been North African Berbers, but in view of their peaceful settlement historians seriously entertain the possibility that they may have been Jews . Whether these were Jews who did not accompany the exodus out of Egypt but moved westward along the North African coast, or migrants from Jewish colonies established in North Africa by conquerors of the Jewish people, is not known. At all events, these settlers gained ascendancy in the fourth century over the Negroes among whom they lived and so laid the foundations for what later became the empire of Ghana. They founded a dynasty which maintained itself in power until about 770. It was then overthrown by the Negro rulers of the Soninke people to the south. It is these who actually gave to the empire the name of Ghana, and they ruled over it for nearly four hundred and fifty years. More than its successors, it was characterized by peace and a relative absence of military ambition. At its peak the empire of Ghana stretched about 800 miles from west to east and from 300 miles below the Sahara northward into the desert to where Berber tribes lived. An historian writes,

> Under the Soninke kings, Ghana seems to have enjoyed firm government and good order for more than two centuries. The gold trade flourished, and Ghana became famous for its prosperity and wealth. Many North African Muslims were attracted to settle there as merchants or as officials in the service of the pagan Soninke court. A Muslim town of stone grew up a few miles away from the Soninke town of mud and thatch.

It is from this empire that the present state of Ghana takes its name. Actually, there was probably little if any connection between the area covered by the present Ghana and the empire of its earlier namesake, since that kingdom is said to have lain considerably to the north. But that is not important. Early Ghana, as the most peaceful of the former West African empires, is a fitting name for the contemporary experiment in self-rule and self-development in West Africa.

Sosso and Mali

The empire of Ghana was broken up by a combination of two Berber tribes living in the desert with whom the Soninke rulers had had frequent conflicts. The two tribes became known as the Almoravids, a fanatic Islamic sect which declared a holy war with the purpose of converting the pagan peoples of the Sudan. How well their aim succeeded we do not know. It is known that about 1085 the empire of Ghana received from them a blow from which it never recovered. The Almoravids did not themselves establish an empire and we hear little more of them.

In time there stepped into the vacuum created by the disintegration of Ghana a rival power known as Sosso. The descendants of the Jews whom the Soninke rulers overthrew had fled westward and settled in a place called Tekrur about 150 miles inland from the Atlantic coast and on the edge of the Sahara. Here a further miscegenation took place out of which came a stock with a long and imposing history in West Africa, namely, the Fulani. One of their clans called the So was very prominent in building up the kingdom of Kaniaga which in 1203 incorporated Ghana in its expanding imperial embrace. Because the So were prominent in this kingdom, the resulting empire came to be known as that of the Sosso.

The Sosso empire did not have a long life. About 1050 a small but rising state of Mandingo-speaking people had been converted to Islam. It was an aggressive state, and when Sumanguru, the Sosso ruler was at the height of his power, he set about to crush it. In this he would doubtless have succeeded had not the royal power of the Mandingo kingdom passed at that time to a great king, Sundiata. The two met in battle in 1235 and Sumanguru was defeated and killed.

The Sosso Fulani leaders withdrew to Takrur from which the Fulani emerged later to emigrate

to the east. Here they became a great power, subduing the Hausa states of Northern Nigeria under their venerated leader, Usuman dan Fodio, at the end of the eighteenth century. Today the ruling Emirs of Northern Nigeria are all Fulani, not improbably from Jewish descent. All who are acquainted with the Fulani recognize immediately in their slender build and delicate features a strain that bears little relation to the typical Negro of the Sudan.

Sundiata established his headquarters in a new city on the upper Niger, called Mali, from whence also the name of the empire that now began to grow. In five years time he subdued the whole of the Sosso empire. Sundiata's generals continued expanding the empire which reached its height during the reign of the great Mansa Musa, 1307-1332. Of him and of his empire we read,

> Caravans from Morocco, Cyrenaica and Egypt regularly visited Mali, and Mansa Musa maintained ambassadors at Fez. Those of his Muslim predecessors who had reigned for any length of time had all made the pilgrimage to Mecca, but Mansa Musa's pilgrimage astounded Egypt and Arabia with its magnificence. His equipage included 500 slaves and he is reported to have taken with him something like 50,000 oz. of gold, much of which he distributed as alms and presents. On his return Mansa Musa brought with him a number of distinguished Muslim scholars who settled in Mali and Timbuctu. One of them, El Saheli, is generally credited with the introduction of burnt-brick architecture in the western Sudan, building a great mosque at Gao, and at Timbuctu (which was beginning to surpass Walata as a center of Muslim trade and culture) a mosque and a palace for Mansa Musa.

Musa's successors were not able to prevent the disintegration of the empire and it fell apart piecemeal, making way for another which, from a cultural point of view, saw the height of West African achievement, the Songhai empire.

Songhai

A dynasty of Berber, called the Dia, had by 1335 reached considerable power in an area around the middle Niger. Probably because of trade contacts with North Africa, the Dia had become Moslems 200 years earlier. Being part of the Mali kingdom, the Dia asserted their independence when the death of Mansa Musa revealed the inability of the empire to continue to maintain itself. It was not until 130 years later, however, that the Dia set about expanding their borders. Their warriors were from the Songhai people over whom they had already reigned so long. Sonni (Liberator) Ali, a capable but cruel war lord, was the first to begin the expansion. Besides his conquests he is noted for his merciless sack of Timbuktu.

Things took an immediate turn for the better under his successor, Askia Muhammed I, who ruled from 1492 to 1528. He not only extended the empire still further, so that at its height it covered an area of 1600 miles in width, but he also stabilized the empire with extensive reforms. In 1497 he made a pilgrimage to Mecca, in part to secure himself more securely on the throne which he had obtained not by descent but by usurping it after the death of Sonni Ali. The following account gives some idea of what the Songhai empire was like:

> In 1497, with the legitimacy of his rule still worrying him, he left his brother in charge of the kingdom and set out on a pilgrimage to Mecca and Cairo. Having shown the necessary lavishness in Mecca and Medina, he proceeded to Cairo to seek formal investiture at the hands of the Khalif, the religious head of the Muhammedan world. After certain formalities the Khalif consented and Askia Muhammad's conscience was allayed. While in Cairo, he and the distinguished Songhays with him took every opportunity of meeting the foremost scholars and statesmen of the day. From their counsels the Songhay Empire was to benefit in no small degree.
>
> During the first years of his reign Askia effected a great religious revival, and on all sides mosques were rebuilt and schools founded. He completely won the confidence and the assistance of the religious leaders. . . . The civil population could now turn its undivided attention to trade and commerce, and it was not long before the prosperity of the country began to increase noticeably. After his return from Cairo, Askia inaugurated a regular system of market inspectors, which guaranteed honest measure and fair dealings. European goods in large quantities began to find their way into the country. . . .
>
> Civilization made great strides; the study of law flourished, systems of banking and credit improved, spacious buildings of tasteful design began to arise, habits of dress became more elegant; in short, the Sudan began to awake from its animal sleep and to absorb the culture and refining influences of the Mediterranean.

It may be protested that this development was not due to Negro skill but to that of Hamitic and Arab influences coming in from the outside. In reply to this we must observe, in the first place, that the Songhai were Negroes and it was they who took the initiative in securing the assistance of older civilizations. In the second place, few civilizations have pulled themselves up by their own bootstraps, least of all the European which is completely unexplainable except in terms of its Greek and Roman antecedents.

Timbuktu

Timbuktu was not an empire. It was (and still is) a city. It was the pride of the Songhai empire, the heart and center of West African learning and culture.

There used to be a song on the ephemeral American jazz scene entitled, "Two-Buck Tim from Timbukto." The Timbukto of imperial glory deserves to be better known among us than that. It was situated on the northern bank of the Niger at the point where that mighty river curves sharply from pursuing a northern to a southern course. It was the meeting place where the desert-crossing caravans and the merchants of the Sudan interior, converging upon it on foot, on horseback, and by boat, exchanged the products of North and South. Founded about

confined in Morocco. In this way all that was most cultured and learned, all that was most refined in the whole Sudan was lost. Their possessions were seized and their wonderful libraries destroyed. From now onwards Sudanese history is merely that of chicanery and primitive violence.

When the year 1600 came around, there was no great empire left in the Western Sudan. The collapse of the Songhai empire and the spiritual death of Timbuktu left the Sudan in a state of anarchy and misrule in which the stronger imposed his will on the weaker until a stronger than he appeared. For three hundred years West Africa became the happy hunting ground of slave raiders and slave merchants, Mohammedan and Christian. The former drove their human booty across the desert to North Africa, Egypt, and Arabia. The latter had them brought down in caravans through the rain forest, after which they were herded into barracoons and into stinking ship-holds to be transported to America. Students of the subject estimate that during this period 40,000,000 slaves were captured in slave wars conducted for European and American benefit alone. Of these some 20,000,000 died in the raids, on the way to the coast, and on the ocean voyage. The remainder were finally put to work in an alien land.

How different the course of West African history might have been if North Africa had not become Mohammedan. Now the better part of West Africa is of the Mohammedan faith, and it is a miracle that Christianity has made the advances it has. One's thoughts cannot but go back to the break-through of the Mohammedan armies into Egypt and to the Atlantic, a break-through that would probably not have taken place had Christianity not been rent by doctrinal feuds. The Bible and its Christ might then have become the inspiration of West Africa, rather than the Koran and its prophet. How powerfully too this might have affected the slave trade. But of this another time. Let us for now remember that Africa is capable of greatness.*

* Quotations in this article are taken from *Introduction to the History of West Africa* by J. D. Fage, 1955; *The Muhammadan Emirates of Nigeria* by S. J. Hogben, 1930; and *Ghana, the Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah*, 1957.

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1100, it grew under the sway of successive empires until under Askia Muhammad I it reached its cultural height. This is what the historian tells us about Timbuktu:

> At Timbuktu the University of Sankore became the center of Muslim learning in Africa. Here, many years before, men of saintly and scholarly bent had collected within the precincts of the mosque, and the dissemination of the Scriptures, letters, and science became their life's work, just as it used to be with the monks in Europe. Gradually this group of learned men attracted the attention of professors from Moorish Spain and from the Universities of Fez, Tunis and Cairo; ideas and learning were exchanged to such a degree that in course of time pupils came to Timbuktu in increasing numbers. To illustrate the standard of learning reached in the University of Sankore it is interesting to note in the *Tarikh* [the *Tarikh es Sudan*, a history of the Sudan written by a Timbuktu scholar] that "a celebrated lawyer of Hedjaz, arriving in Timbuktu with the intention of teaching, found the town full of Sudanese scholars. Seeing that they were superior to him in learning he returned to Fez, where he succeeded in obtaining employment." Each savant generally, but not always, followed his special vocation . . . . There was no more valued thing in Timbuktu than a book, and infinite care and toil were devoted to collecting together libraries which became beyond price. In this manner the Arabic learning and culture began to find their way into the borders of the neighbouring countries, many of which were still primitive.

This is an Africa of which we seldom hear. With the exception of Spain, Timbuktu probably rivalled the culture of the European countries. It is the bright star of African history which, it is to be hoped, will in other ways and in other places shine again. It is, at all events, a wonderful example of achievement to hold before young Africans of today bedevilled as they too often are by an inferiority complex as they suddenly face the advanced and technical civilizations of Europe and America.

The promise which Timbuktu held for the future was not destined to be realized. In the Sahara, a distance north of Timbuktu, there were salt mines which the Sultan of Morocco had long wanted to control. Making overtures in 1590 to the then ruling Askia Ishak II, he was repulsed and decided to resort to force. He dispatched from Marrakech a force of about 4,000 soldiers of whom probably only 1,000 survived the desert march. These, however, were armed with guns and were more than a match for the Songhai soldiers. When it seemed as though Timbuktu would refuse to acknowledge the Moroccan authority, the general commanding the Moroccan forces, Mahmud, put an end not only to the alleged rebellion but also to all that had made Timbuktu great:

> By a trick he succeeded in enticing all the chief personages of Timbuktu into the mosque, as if to swear an oath of allegiance. Suddenly all the doors were closed. All were arrested. His next step was one which had tremendous bearing on the subsequent darkness and ignorance of the Sudan. He gave orders that all the intelligentsia of the city with their wives and families should be driven like sheep across the desert to be

Toward a Distinctive Curriculum for Christian Education

By Donald Oppewal

THE CURRICULUM of any school system is one of e practical expressions of its philosophy of educa- ion; the kinds of subjects a school offers is as lear an index as anything to its theory of the inction of education. The curriculum, fully as uch as the quality of the teachers or the extent of ie facilities, determines what kind of education will e going on there.

The curriculum of a typical public high school often a miscellaneous collection of subjects and ctivities, and it is often built on the spot as a sult of community pressures and prevailing opin- ns. Curriculums vary from community to mmunity and from one time to another. The ublic school system lacks a clear and consistent hilosophy of education, and many educators openly nfess that public education is in a state of crisis ecause of this lack.

Such ought not to be the case in Christian educa- on. We ought not to partake of the confusion hich besets public education, and yet it is becoming ore and more difficult to distinguish the course fferings in a Christian high school from the curric- lum in the neighboring public school. Outside f the inclusion of Bible at regular intervals, there s less and less difference between the secular and he Christian curriculum. I submit that this present tate of affairs tends to give the lie to our repeated nsistence upon the distinctiveness of Christian ducation, and reflects the fact that we have ab- orbed more than we care to admit the secular ramework of the very education which we bemoan.

Few individuals interested in Christian education vill deny that we do not now have as clear an idea f the shape and extent of the Christian curriculum s we would like. All agree that it should be dis- inctive, but we are not sure in which direction his distinctiveness lies, or even what type of dis- inctiveness is basic and real, and what type is only uperficial and arbitrary — difference for the sake f being different.

Although there are many areas clamoring for ttention in Christian education, such as the teacher nd the textbook, it seems to me that we have over- ooked the importance of the curriculum itself. We ave poured our money and energies into Christian eachers and Christian textbooks, and have largely neglected to face the question of whether or not there is such a thing as a Christian curriculum as distinct from a secular one. I should like to briefly outline several ideas about it which are present in the Christian community, and offer tentative suggestions as to the value of each.

There seem to be at least three views of the place and importance of the curriculum in developing an adequate philosophy of education. Each of them is a live option which carries with it practical as well as theoretical consequences. Even on a practical and financial level we shall have to decide how far we can go in keeping up with the public schools. In view of the tremendous budgets required for maintenance of public schools, this matter is of more than academic importance. With limited finances at our disposal, we shall have to determine where our dollar is being spent for Christian education and where for something else.

ONE attitude toward a curriculum is that it is necessary to have a distinctive one. According to this view, any course, whether chemistry or cooking, remains the same in detail as if taught anywhere else. The difference lies not in the course, but in the classroom and campus atmosphere. The teacher is a Christian and deals in Christian love with the student, exhorting him to practice the Christian virtues of diligence and honesty in working at the subject, whether it be biology or bicycle repair. The students are all, or mainly, covenant children and the social atmosphere is conducive to Christian conduct. Chapel exercises and daily prayers are utilized to strengthen this atmosphere, and Bible courses are required of all, but for the rest the curriculum as such is assumed to be largely irrelevant to the goals of Christian education. Any subject is automatically baptized into Christianity by immersion in a Christian atmosphere.

Without underestimating for a moment the importance of proper environment, it seems to me that we are then left in our curriculum planning with nothing to guide us, and we can, and often do, unwittingly absorb secular frames of reference into our courses. We, like the public schools, are forced to include any and all activities which pressures demand, because we have no basis on which

to include or exclude. Failing to see that the public curriculum is itself a product of a secular society, we accept it for our own, and are thus caught up in the curricular confusion so evident in the public schools.

In another view of the curriculum, it is maintained that distinctiveness is achieved by the insertion of Christian ideas and religious truths where they have been overlooked or deliberately eliminated in public schools. The framework of the curriculum remains the same, except for the addition of Bible courses, and any school board desiring to begin a school need only copy down an outline of courses listed in the local superintendent's office. In this view distinctiveness is achieved by special textbooks and courses of study. These fill in with Christian interpretation where there are glaring differences on certain points. For example, in order to make up for the defects in a secular text, to a science course might be added a section on creationism, to a course in literature might be added choice bits of religious poetry and essays on Christian truth, and to a course in history might be added several sections at stragetic points on the truth that God determines all of history and is providentially caring for his people. Similarly, to a course in cooking can be added a section to inform the student that God wants us to take good care of our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit, to a course in civics can be added a section that governments are instituted by God and ought to be obeyed, and to a course in driver education might be added the idea that God wants us to drive carefully because all men are made in His image and are not to be killed. Thus, subject matter is baptized, this time not by immersion in a Christian atmosphere, but my sprinkling with Christian assertion at strategic points. As in doctrine, so too in education, to some this latter view represents the purest product of Reformed thinking.

At the same time it is uncritically accepted that science, history, literature, cooking, civics, and driver education are all equally fit subjects for Christian education. We are again left in our curriculum planning without any principle of inclusion or exclusion, and with this view too we are swept along with the public schools and their confusion.

The third view is one that is often mentioned by educators and ministers in passing, but rarely pressed to a practical conclusion. It is readily admitted that the concept of revelation plays a large part in Christian education and forms the basis for our thinking, but rarely is this applied to the curriculum to see if it could give us a principle for establishing a distinctive approach to education. The attempt here will be to ske briefly what would seem to be the meaning a implication of such a principle for curricul planning as the following: *The distinctive purp of Christian education is the study and appropr tion of revelation, both general and special.*

The terms "general" and "special" as applied revelation are well-known Reformed terms and used to designate the distinction between the Bi as special revelation and the rest of creation general revelation. As Reformed theology has God has written of Himself in two books, and ea of them, studied in the light of the other, yie important insights into the nature of God. Si there is no quarrel, and I hope no confusion, o the place of special revelation in the Christi curriculum, most of the time will be devoted the concept of general revelation.

Even a young catechumen knows the text Psalms that says, "The heavens declare the glo of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork but it is little more than words learned by r memory until much later in life. To see God every aspect of creation is a life-long task and not at all to be equated with simply believing th He is there. In order to determine how and wh creation does in fact become a means of revelati of God for the individual, we shall have to pr the matter farther. If, as the Psalmist says, t heavens do declare the glory of God, what do one look for in a sunset or a thunderstorm, a if the firmament does show His handiwork, wh does one see of God in a rabbit, a Chevrolet, a beautiful woman? On what should Christi education focus if it is to take seriously the readi of the book of general revelation?

In the case of the thunderstorm and the suns I think that it should be clear that to say one h a feeling of awe and majesty in the thunderstor or a sense of wonder at the sight of the sunset, only to confess that there has been no revelatio These terms are the ones we use to acknowled that our minds are baffled, and that we are ca upon emotional reaction to report our experien We confess only that our emotions have been mov by something which is beyond our minds to compr hend. This solution is at best inadequate as definition of revelation, and at worst an avoidan of the real task of growing in knowledge of G because it accepts the emotion as the insight, a confuses the sensation with the source.

If we press the illustration of the thunderstor a little farther, we shall see that we *can* see God a thunderstorm, and further that it is educati and the school which make the most significa contribution to this kind of knowledge of God. both a child and a physicist, each schooled in t Christian faith, observe a thunderstorm, it is obvio

t the physicist sees more than the child, even ugh their eyes receive the same impressions. is *more* that the physicist sees is the operation the laws of matter and energy, of electricity, and lecules of air acting and reacting. The physicist s pattern and structure and meaning to the nderstorm, while the child sees only sound d fury, because the physicist knows the laws ich produce the rain, the thunder, and the htning. Both observers know the words of e Psalmist, but the physicist sees God in the rkings of the thunderstorm, while the child periences only light, noise, and dampness. The ild's vision of God's power and might is hampered his lack of insight into the pattern, the system, e structure of weather. To the extent that he es and experiences no laws or is aware of no ttern, he knows not God in general revelation.

In the foregoing illustration there is advanced the ea that in order to render the words of the salmist meaningful for education, it must deal ith laws, with the pattern, the structure, the sign if you will, of God's creation. The contenon so far has been that this structure inherent any object or experience is the carrier of revelaon is not appropriated until this awareness takes lace. It has been maintained that emotions of we, wonder, joy, and the like are preliminary ates induced by the presence of revelation, but re not an end in themselves.

This pattern, this structure of things must not e conceived of as something purely intellectual r ideational, involving nothing but the brain. The hole individual comes into play in this act of nowing and appropriating revelation. Since rocess is not purely intellectual, it does not even lways involve the formulating of propositions or he stating of laws. It so happens that in some reas, physics for example, many of these patterns ave been codified and stated as laws, but each of hem was the product of human experience and was ot simply given as a proposition. In the social tudies, those which deal with people and their elationships, fewer "laws" have been codified, but ach insight into human nature, into what makes eople tick, is what is meant by pattern, structure, aw.

The acceptance of revelation as a key concept in curriculum building and the definition of revelation as pattern transmitted, has important consequences, for these insights become the primary goal of Christian education and the means by which the image of God is developed. The one who is shaped, patterned, literally *informed* by God in general revelation is the godly person. If we then proceed to use this concept for our curriculum building and choose those subjects and areas which are the best avenues for getting at the structure of creation, we will not have merely education with religion, or even religious education, but education which is in and of itself religious in nature. This principle, if valid, gives our administrators and school boards a basis on which to construct a curriculum on their own. If an area can be investigated in order to discover God, it can become truly Christian; if it cannot, then no amount of prayers at the beginning of class, or chapel afterward, can make it anything in essence but secular, and in using it as Christian education, we shall be giving stones when we are asked for bread.

Let us turn now to various subject areas and to various activities in the curriculum to see how this principle might be used for determining which subjects can be used as avenues for discovering God in creation. If we should discover some that seem not to offer this possibility, we may well want to consider whether they really belong in education which is called Christian. They may be practical, they may be useful, they may be enjoyable, they may be worthwhile, but we shall have a hard time calling them Christian education. In order to be justified in a curriculum, any subject should be an avenue for growing in knowledge of God through the progressive absorption of the pattern, the system, the structure inherent in that area. Any such pattern or law understood and made part of experience reveals another facet of the nature of God who made them, upholds them, and is reflected in them. Obviously, not all of God is revealed in any one law or set of laws, but God in general revelation is the sum total of all laws or pattern; He is the One in whom all the diverse patterns are focused and find meaning.

In the physical sciences, for example, we shall be eager to admit all subjects which give us insight into the workings of the universe, but we shall be wary of all subjects, such as dietetics, when they become informational rather than analytical, when they become practical and vocational without being grounded in law and pattern. This will not be out of contempt for the practical and vocational, but out of respect for the revelational. Whatever else our educational responsibility is to the rising generation, our primary duty is to have them grow in knowledge of God, not only as Creator and Redeemer, but also as Lord of all.

Mathematics, too, when it is taught as reflecting the nature of the quantitative structure of the physical world, and the laws by which we may expect it to operate, will serve as a fruitful medium for discovering new facets of God in nature. When, however, it is taught only as a tool for computing acreage or income tax, or as a handy means of transacting business, it loses its Christian educational significance.

In the biological sciences, all those subjects which deal with the laws of growth, whether plant or animal, or human, will infuse the student with the pattern and structure of things as they are made by God. When they become hygiene or husbandry, they sacrifice the religious insight for the vocational technique, and thus are disqualified as an avenue of general revelation. They may be useful and interesting, but the student cannot find his God in them.

In the social sciences those subjects which deal with the pattern and structure of society and men's relationships with each other can be used in Christian education. Language, for example, whether English or foreign, ancient or modern, when it is studied for the structure of language itself, will yield fruit for Christian education which is quickly lost when language is regarded solely as a tool for communication, or for doing business with Latin America. Literature, when it is taught, not as information or amusement, but as the laws of living viewed in operation in real situations, will cause the student to grow in knowledge of God through understanding man who is made in His image. History, too, when it is studied not simply for its information but for its pattern and historical laws, becomes the medium for seeing God in history. He will be seen at all points rather than only at crucial points where it is assumed that He pr dentially intervened in behalf of His people. Mu when it is taught from the viewpoint of appre tion and theory, will be more readily admit than music when it is taught simply as vocal instrumental skills. Again, these skills may be ple urable and even useful, but they lack the necess qualifications for being avenues of approach to G They thus would be out of place in a Christian c riculum, although perhaps quite in place as an ext curricular social activity.

All other courses, such as physical educati manual arts, journalism, home economics, dri education, etc. *ad infinitum* will be also requi to show their credentials before being allow into a curriculum which dares to call itself Chr tian. Failing to meet the standards, they will regretfully cast out as at best distracting from t real business of Christian education, and at wo substituting themselves for it and masqueradi as the real thing. This is not to say that nc of these can be admitted; it is only to say that th will be admitted only insofar as they are able be used as an avenue of revelation. In admitti them without proper credentials we will have inde wasted our educational substance in riotous tea ing and will have sold our distinctive educatio birthright for a mess of pottage.

Pages From the Past

For the Centennial Year — a collection of contemporary accounts and documents which reflect something of the origins c developing life of the Christian Reformed Church. Selected and edited by Dr. George Stob.

The Christian Reformed Church and Lodge Membership

It has been thought, and it has often been said, that one of the reasons for the Secession of 1857 was dissatisfaction with the position of the Dutch Reformed Church in tolerating lodge members within its membership. This is not borne out by documents bearing on this history.

In none of the secession documents is there any mention of the issue of the lodge. Prof. G. K. Hemkes, in his *Het Rechtsbestaan der Holl. Chr. Geref. Kerk*, p. 63, says that the church of Graafschap (which offered the most extensive and detailed account of its secession, "could also have added the objection against Freemasons in the church." This is an untenable judgment, since if it were an issue at all it would have been a major issue, as it did become in 1882, and would certainly have been mentioned as a reason for the Secession.

The fact is that the issue of the toleration of lodge membership finds no mention in the complaints registered at Classis Holland against the union with the Dutch Reformed Church. Even Gijsbert Haan, for all the vigor of his attack against the Dutch Reformed Church, did not register the complaint until he wrote his *Stem Eens Belasterden* in 1871 — fourteen years after t Secession, and some time after Haan himself had turn the full wheel of seceding from the Dutch Reform Church, returning to it, and leaving it a second tim

There is only one reference to lodge membership the Minutes of Classis Holland, from which it appea that Classis Holland itself took an unequivocal positi in the matter.

In Art. 6 of the Minutes of September 26, 1853, t following occurs:

By Van de Luister, a member of the church Holland, the classical judgment is asked about t point whether or not it is lawful for a member the church to be a Freemason. All look upon as works of darkness, and thus unlawful for [church] member.

In his *Stem*, Gijsbert Haan apparently makes referen to this instance, when he reports the following:

. . . A member of the Holland congregation can with a letter he had received from Milwaukee, co

ning the question: If it was permissible to receive church members those who were known to belong he order of Freemasons. He wanted the judgment the brethren as to how he should answer this estion. But the unreasonable and unseemly treatnt given to this man, at that time unknown to , by some of the ministers present, angered me eedingly. "What is your intention," he was ked "in bringing this letter here to Classis?" othing other," was the answer, "than to hear the lgment of the brethren." "No," it was replied, ou want to throw a bomb upon the Dutch Rermed Church," and this was accompanied with ny derogatory expressions. I entered the dission, and said: "Brothers, this evil, Freemasonry, so general in America that many ministers and embers also of the Dutch Reformed Church belong this order. And this, together with all the other -Reformed things that are found, makes it desirle, in my judgment, that we should be a church ourselves here, though in union with the Seceded urch in the Netherlands, and abandon our union th the Dutch Reformed Church. What need ve we of it?" etc.

Now there was no lack of opposition, not so uch from the members, but it was especially from e side of the ministers. Rev. Van Raalte, taking ote of the dissatisfaction among the people and tryg to set them at rest, began with the question: What is Freemasonry, anyhow? A secret! Yes, childish secret. People want something secretive. ell now, here we have that childish thing. And at they give each other the helping hand in trouble, n't that a praiseworthy thing?" etc. And from at time on there was hardly a Classis meeting t which it was not said: "Why can't we be a eople by ourselves," and this was occasioned by he fact that every now and then something else bout the Dutch Reformed Church was revealed which had not been known before. (From Haan's *Stem*, in translation in *The Reformed Journal*, anuary 1957, p. 15).

The Christian Reformed Church did not adopt any position on the lodge — no doubt because no occasion for it arose previously — until the Classis meeting held on Feburary 20, 1867, at which time the Classis declared, in answer to a question from the Grand Rapids church:

Also as concerns Freemasonry, it is decided that after all means have been exerted and [are] unfruitful [with reference to] those who become members of it, they should be cast out of the church. (Art. 15 of the Minutes)

The rigor of the Christian Reformed position becomes evident from a decision of the General Assembly taken in the same year. In the Minutes of the General Assembly of June 19, 1867, Art. 20, the following occurs:

It is asked: Whether W. Van Leeuwen may be married in the church, seeing he is a Freemason and has separated from the congregation. It is judged that he must first quit the Lodge and make public confession in the congregation; also, his bride must first join the church and submit to its discipline.

The first approach to a reasoned position was taken by the General Assembly on June 10, 1868. In Art. 17 of these minutes, the following occurs:

Upon motion of Niekerk it is decided that members of the church who belong to secret societies, must be dealt with ecclesiastically, since they cannot at the same time be members of the Church of Christ.

This position was several times reaffirmed. In time the issue of Freemasonry in the church became the major point for exhibiting the difference between the Christian Reformed Church and the Dutch Reformed Church, and was often thought of as being by itself adequate ground for the separation (even though it did not register as a ground at the actual time of Secession). This will appear from what was written by the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church to the Synod of the Reformed Church in South Africa. Part of a letter addressed to that Synod in 1880 reads:

Our Church becomes more and more confirmed in the matter of the ground of separation in the light of subsequent developments. And if the ground of Secession from the American Reformed Church seems somewhat doubtful for many brothers in that denomination and for many in the Christian Reformed Church in the Netherlands, we trust that in the measure people become closely acquainted with the ecclesiastical life in America and the arbitrary actions of the Synod [of the Reformed Church in America — Ed.] as has become more clear than ever in connection with the matter of Freemasonry, to the deep grief of the Holland portion of that Church — people will more fully acknowledge the grounds or reasons for the Secession." (Minutes of the Synod of 1880, Supplement VII).

The Synod of 1900 adopted the most complete statement concerning the incompatibility of lodge membership in the Christian Church, when it adopted an extensive report submitted to it by appointment from the Synod of 1898. The report registered the following strictures against the lodge: (1) "Their oath or pledge of secrecy with reference to something not yet known, is very careless and sinful. (2) "Another dangerous and sinful element may be found in an unlimited promise of mutual helpfulness." (3) "The Lodge brings us into a brotherhood which is unlawful for the Christian." (4) "The 'Initiations' of the Lodge are unworthy of the Christian." (5) "The so-called religion of the lodge is a denial of the only way of salvation." (6) "Finally, subject to serious disapproval is the unlimited pledge of obedience, even before the candidate is made acquainted with the laws, rules, and edicts of the lodge."

In consequence of this the following conclusions were drawn, which may be taken to constitute the fullest official statement of the position of the Christian Reformed Church with reference to lodge membership:

Must the church deal with her members, in the event they meanwhile are members of Secret Societies, and if they persist, excommunicate them?

After what has been said above, it must be clear to every one who impartially considers, that membership in the lodge is a sin, and not only a secret but a public sin, not the sin of a moment, but a continuous living in it. It is therefore a gross sin for every person, but especially for a member of the church. The Christian, indeed, stands not only as a man, but as a covenant child before God, and we can find a clear prescription of that to which a covenant child is pledged in our Formula for Baptism. He confesses himself to be a subject of King Jesus, and will such an one then deny Him in the lodge, and with a blind oath swear allegiance to that kingdom of darkness? He is as a child of light the follower of Jesus who did nothing in secret. The answer to the above question depends only on this question: Is the Church called to punish publicly known gross sinners and if they persist excommunicate them? Now it may be true that everything that is un-Christian is not yet censurable, but no one who is Reformed will deny that anyone who dishonors God publicly and permanently, and who in practice denies his confession to the offense of the church, is subject to punishment. Much less can it be considered a question for a Reformed person whether churches, living in one communion, must follow one and the same line of practice. To deny that would be out and out Independentistic." (*Acts* 1900, Supplement 10, pp. 96-101).

The Lodge Issue in the Reformed Church in America

Meanwhile, but several years after the Secession of 1857 had occurred, the question of lodge membership became a live issue in the Dutch Reformed Church (which had meanwhile changed its name to "The Reformed Church in America"). That church was greatly agitated from the time of 1868 to 1882, and because she failed to take a position which would require the excommunication of lodge members, several congregations in the West seceded and affiliated with the Christian Reformed Church, the most notable among them being Van Raalte's own church, the First Reformed Church of Holland, Michigan.

The following records will give some account of the struggle that was taking place in the Reformed Church in America, and will show the characteristic features of her position in the matter.

In 1868 the Classis of Holland and Wisconsin sent overtures to the General Synod of the Reformed Church, asking "the General Synod to deliver a distinct utterance of its disapprobation of the connection of the Lord's people with the Order of Freemasons, in order that the moral power of our whole Synod adopted the following:

Your Committee, having carefully examined the records of synodical action upon similar overtures, find that the uniform usage of the Church has been to abstain from deliverance upon all abstract qu tions which are not purely ecclesiastical, or wh may involve the exercise of consistorial discipli they therefore recommend the following resoluti

Resolved, That this Synod do not consider proper to express our opinion in the case." (*A and Proceedings,* General Synod of the Reform Church in America, June 1868, Art. VII, p. 46

These same two Classes again overtured Gen Synod in 1869, as a result of which the Sy appointed a special committee for study. The re and recommendation adopted at the Synod of 1 reads, in part, as follows:

Our brethren are evidently sincere and earn in their convictions. They are greatly perple on account of what they perceive to be a seri evil in the Church, and they have done well to st their difficulties. We cannot think, however, t they expect from Synod such a deliverance would authorize Consistories to exclude Free M sons from church fellowship, for this would be establish a new and unauthorized test of memb ship in the Christian Church, and would interf with consistorial prerogatives.

But at the same time your Committee believe t the path of prudence and safety lies outside of oath-bound secret societies, in connection w which obligations may be exacted which conf with the liberty of the individual Christian c science.

Moreover, they are convinced that the ordinan of the Christian religion, in connection with a vinely appointed ministry, if faithfully attended furnish all needful moral and spiritual cultu while the Christian Church possesses, in its h teachings, and its pledges of mutual love, a higher capacity for the development of practi benevolence than can be found in the moral lesso of any mere human organization. (*Ibid.,* 1870, A VII, pp. 96, 97).

Classis Wisconsin again presented an overture 1871, but the General Synod decided to abide by deliverance of 1870. At the Synod of 1874 a cenci case involving the complaint of a member who h been suspended by his consistory for lodge members was dealt with. The complainant was advised to foll proper procedure and make appeal, if he felt hims aggrieved, to the Classis (*Ibid,* 1874, Art. VIII, 106, 107).

An extensive deliverance by the General Synod 1880 resulted from overtures presented by four Classes those of Grand River, Holland, Wisconsin, and Illinc The advisory committee report, which was accep and adopted, follows:

These memorials substantially embrace the sa line of discussion and requests. They purport to e press the sentiments of the Consistories and chur members of the several Classes. They represe that their Churches are disquieted and in danger

sion and discord, on account of the renewed ap-ing of this question among "them"; that their dition is truly critical and intolerable"; and ; "this agitation against Freemasonry is not thing new but an old and deep-rooted convic-." They aver that they "do not pass judgment he moral or Christian character of any person nected with this order, but on organized insti-ons having their own doctrine, laws, and cere-nies by which they can be known and judged." reasons which are given specifically and at great gth, in their memorials, these Classes declare t "Free Masonry is (1) anti-Republican; (2) i-Christian; and (3) anti-Reformed." In sup-t of these assertions they present certain testi-nies from Masonic books, and persons who have ounced the order, and other sources, — all of ich must be judged by their separate claims and oofs of credibility.

So far, however, as these papers are concerned, y are all on one side, with no contradictory or re-ting testimonies. Their allegations against Ma-ry may be summed up in the statement that it ims to be "a religious institution, which is not y Christless but anti-Christian; and that it in-ves oaths, obligations, and ceremonies and asso-tions which are inconsistent with the principles d fellowship of the Christian Church."

The memorialists therefore ask of this General nod a deliverance containing (1) Advice. (2) stimony. (3) Active opposition to Free Mason-. They declare their conviction that "no Free ason or Odd Fellow, or member of any oath-bound cret society should be allowed within our com-union." They also say: "We ministers and elders not knowingly allow Free Masons to member-ip in our Churches. We forbid them the celebra-on of the Lord's Supper with us. But when we at-nd our Particular or General Synods, we are some-mes obliged to hear the Gospel preached and to eceive the Communion from the hands of those hom we would disfellowship. Hence, we are neces-arily inconsistent and offend our consciences."

It is further stated, by the Classis of Wisconsin, that unless this question is settled satisfactorily here is danger that we should lose several esteemed nembers of our Churches in spite of any influence ve may be able to exert to the contrary, and that or this reason the new immigrants from the Neth-rlands, who are coming in large numbers, will unite hemselves with another communion."

The Classis of Grand River takes special pains to deny "rumors that have gained currency that we are desirous of severing our connection with your body," and "hereby assert that in no manner, form or shape, do we think or desire anybody to think of separation from the Reformed Church in America, and we declare that we would consider such an act as a crime and a misfortune to ourselves and the whole Church."

From this condensation of the four memorials, the Synod will see that the subject, as thus presented, is not "abstract," but concrete; that it touches vital points of our faith and order and fellowship as a Church of Christ; and that it must needs be considered with the utmost circumspection and fidelity to all the great interests which it involves.

It must also be admitted that a subject which is so grave ought to have free and full discussion, and that no decision ought to be made upon it which does not respect the personal liberty, the rights of conscience and Christian obligations and privileges which are guaranteed to every minister and member of our Reformed Church by her Constitution, her doctrinal symbols, and her historic loyalty to freedom and to faith. Moreover, it is eminently proper and desirable for the Synod to declare that no other tests of church membership, and of Christian and ministerial fellowship should be applied than those which are set forth in our standards, and that church discipline, in all its shapes, must be taken in conformity with the Word of God and the established order of our Church. Your Committee believe, especially that in a matter which is so delicate and complicated as this, the ends which are sought for by the memorialists will be best secured by the power of Christian instruction and persuasion, and by Gospel principles faithfully applied, "with all longsuffering and meekness," and without strife or division, and without severity to those who may be "out of the way." Your Committee therefore recommends the adoption of the following resolutions:

1. *Resolved,* That this General Synod, after deliberate consideration of the memorials . . . do hereby recognize and appreciate with those bodies and the Churches which they represent, the practical difficulties and perplexities which are set forth in their respective papers.

2. *Resolved,* That while, on the *ex parte* evidence of the memorials now before it, this Synod cannot properly give its official testimony for or against Free Masonry and other oath-bound secret societies; and while it holds as sacred the indefeasible rights of all its ministers and members to their individual conscientious convictions and liberty of speech and action, subject only to their prior loyalty to Christ and His church, yet it hereby declares that no communicant member, and no minister of the Reformed Church in America ought to unite with or to remain in any society or institution, whether secret or open whose principles and practices are anti-Christian, or contrary to the faith and practice of the Church to which he belongs.

3. *Resolved,* That this Synod solemnly believes and declares that any system of religion or morals whose tendency is to hide our Savior, or to supplant the religion of which He is the founder, should receive no countenance from His professed followers; and furthermore, that no humane, benevolent or philanthropic, or reforming agency in this world can take the place of the Church of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, whose principle is to "do good unto all men, but specially to them that are of the household of faith," and, therefore, that all who belong to this Church are in duty bound to give it the pre-eminence over all orders or institutions, and to promote to the utmost of their power its unity, peace and prosperity, and especially its great charities and philanthropies.

4. *Resolved,* That this Synod also advises Consistories and Classes of the Church to be very kind and forbearing, and strictly constitutional in their dealings with individuals on this subject, and that they be and are hereby affectionately cautioned against setting up any new or unauthorized tests of communion in the Christian Church." (*Ibid.,* June 1880, Art. VII, pp. 533-536).

This did not bring peace, however. New memorials on the same matter were presented to the General Synod of 1881 by the same four Classes, to which the Synod replied by calling attention to the action of 1870 and especially the second resolution in the report of 1880. General Synod went on to say:

In this resolution . . . General Synod has gone to the very extreme of its authority. It must be borne in mind that the powers of the General Synod are limited; its jurisdiction and authority are a delegated jurisdiction and authority; the sources of which are primarily in the Churches, then with the Classes. The General Synod has no power to declare tenets of doctrine, nor to establish new tests of Church membership; nor to effect any change in the Government or polity of the Church, save through the action of the constituency, in the manner prescribed in the Constitution."

Thereupon the General Synod adopted resolutions which reaffirmed its previous stand. One of the resolutions recommended by the committee was not adopted but laid on the table, and reads as follows:

Resolved, That the Synod affectionately requests the memorialists to consider this as an issue *settled,* and that the Consistories and Classes, in the exercise of discipline against all classes of offenders, *be enjoined* to observe all the requirements of the Constitution, and carefully avoid any action that may lead to schism in the Church of God. (*Ibid.,* June 1881, p. 733).

The struggle in the Reformed Church in America continued, however, and in 1882 two memorials were presented by the Classes Wisconsin and Holland. In response to them the following advice of the Committee was adopted:

In regard to the memorials on the subject of F Masonry, your Committee are gratified in b able to state that both in the written documents sented to the Synod, and in the verbal assura of the delegates from the Classes interested, memorialists take pains to manifest a spirit of alty to the Reformed Church in America, and a dial desire to promote her growth and welfare. is largely due to this consideration that the C mittee have given to the subject, renewedly brou before the Synod, an unusual amount of time, at tion, and kindly effort.

They feel constrained, however, to say that a the most patient inquiry and deliberation on ev phase of the matter referred to them, the Commi find themselves at a loss to discover in what this General Synod can go beyond the action alre taken, without transcending its constitutional p ers. The subject has already been before at l three General Synods of the Church . . . and been so amply investigated by previous committ and so exhaustively discussed upon the floor, t the present Committee do not see how it is poss to throw any new light upon it.

They are not insensible to the embarrassme and perplexities arising to some of our West churches out of the presence of this difficult quest that has marred their peace and diverted their ergy from the legitimate work of the Church. T wish to express for their brethren the sincerest sy pathy, and the warmest desire that every occas of trouble may soon be removed, and that with preme loyalty to Christ and his Church they m go forward with united hearts and hands to grand mission before them.

To cultivate on both sides a disposition to exerc mutual charity and forbearance; to let the d past bury its dead, and to concentrate the liv strength of all Christ's followers upon the one p amount object which they should never forget, salvation of men and the glory of God, your Co mittee firmly believe, would go far toward obviati all the difficulties of the situation. Surely in suc cause, and for such an end, it should be easy Christian men to sacrifice something of their o prejudices or their own preferences upon the al of Christian duty and of Christian love. . . .

In this spirit, and with a view to promote t growing power and usefulness of the Church love, as one of God's appointed agencies to eva gelize our country and the world, your Committ recommend the adoption of the following reso tions:

1. *Resolved,* That all questions in regard to t standing and relations of individuals already communion, and to the acceptance or rejection of a plicants for admission to the privileges of t Church, be referred by this Synod for decision

e several Consistories, upon whom alone, under e Constitution, the responsibility rests, and to iom alone the power belongs.

2. *Resolved,* That while this Synod feels con-rained by the constitutional limitation upon its thority from recommending any course that ould invade the innocent freedom of speech or of tion guaranteed to every Church member by the tablished law and usage of the Church, it would the same time, and in the spirit of Christian kind-ess, while emphatically reaffirming the deliver-ances of the Synod of 1880, as adopted by the Synod 1881, advise all the parties concerned to abstain om any associations, and from pursuing any urse of conduct that would furnish a Scriptural reasonable ground of offense to tender con-iences, or that would be likely to interfere with ie love and cooperation that should always be ound among the disciples of Christ. (*Ibid.*, June 382, pp. 109-111).

Protests continued, however. Several churches seceded from the Reformed Church and affiliated with the Christian Reformed Church. And Classis Wisconsin persisted in her complaints against the toleration of lodge members. The General Synod of 1883 refused to make "an inquiry into the nature, ceremonies, etc., of oath-bound secret societies," on the ground that "this is . . . entirely outside of the powers and prerogatives of General Synod, and withal so impracticable since no institution or society can be fairly judged merely from a one-sided construction of its partially published ritual." The General Synod further reaffirmed the position previously taken, and with reference to the secession of several churches, resolved:

That the General Synod regrets the course upon which some of our Western churches have entered in severing their connection with that historic church, which should be regarded as the true home for Hollanders and their descendants, and in view thereof, and of the action now passed, the General Synod would earnestly admonish those who have severed their connection with our Church to return to her communion, and furthermore, the Synod would entreat all to cherish in their affections and remember in their prayers the Church which has so faithfully preserved its time-honored standards, and has clung so tenaciously thereto, while the mother church in the Old World has become unfaithful to her trust and untrue to her noble past. (*Ibid.*, June 1883, pp. 303, 304).

When the Classis of Wisconsin submitted a memorial again in 1884, the General Synod gave the following answer:

Resolved, That we heartily commend the sincerity and earnestness of the brethren of the Classis of Wisconsin, who have addressed to General Synod a memorial on the subject of oath-bound secret societies. Their unflagging zeal in this direction is a shining example to us all in other departments of Christian activity.

Your Committee, having examined the deliverances of the General Synod on previous memorials of a like nature feel unable to add anything further, and General Synod has no further deliverances to make. (*Ibid.*, 1884, p. 502).

Abraham Kuyper on Freemasonry

This brought an end to the agitation *within* the Reformed Church in America. But debate with the Christian Reformed Church, severely critical of the Reformed Church in America took heart, however, from the judgments expressed on the issue by the great champion of Calvinistic orthodoxy in the Netherlands, Dr. Abraham Kuyper, who wrote the following in the October 30, issue of his paper *De Heraut*:

The question as to whether membership in a Free Masons Lodge is consonant with the Reformed confession, also arises now and again in our country.

A few years ago a vigorous struggle about this was carried on in America, and in that land that conflict has even led to all manner of division.

But it is not necessary, it seems to us, that any difference of opinion should exist on this matter.

Freemasonry is without question a secret society which in principle stands against the Christian religion and the Kingship of Christ.

She has her ideal, and there is something beautiful in that ideal, but that beauty is derived exclusively from natural religion, and precisely on that account she has brought her power in principal conflict with the Cross of Christ.

Not everywhere in the same measure, to be sure; for in England and in America the lodges generally possess a much less inimical character; but this does not do away with the fact that Anglican lodges also rest upon the same untrue principle, to which no servant of Christ *can* say Yea and Amen.

If, therefore, anyone should ask if a person could at the same time be a true confessor of Christ and a conscious adherent of the principle of freemasonry, then it must be answered without equivocation that this is *impossible.*

From which also it must be concluded that whoever loves his brother must strongly advise every confessor of Christ against becoming a freemason, and in the event he is one, must urge him to break that wrong association.

But now, to say forthwith that everyone who has joined the Free Masons, or who does not break with it, denies the Christ and must be excommunicated by the church, goes much too far.

This would be the case if the lodges everywhere pushed their principle to the forefront, declared it

clearly, and required adhesion to this principle from each freemason.

But this is decidedly *not* the case.

Numbers of freemasons know as good as nothing about the real principal by which this association is moved. A confession of a consciously wrong principle has never been required of them. And as a consequence they have never fought the fight between the lodge and the church before their own consciences.

These people didn't know what they did, and for that reason must not be forthwith condemn Much rather, we ought to pray for them, as Je did for his persecutors.

And if this prayer were accompanied with struction and admonition — as men spread m and more clear conceptions concerning the strivi of freemasonry, enlighten folks and help them to derstand — well, then it will not be necessary to communicate anybody, because then every child God will himself turn away from freemason (Translated from copy in H. E. Dosker, *Dr. A. Van Raalte,* pp. 334, 335).

BOOK REVIEWS

THE CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR IN THE AGE OF THE REFORMATION. *By E. Harris Harbison.* 186 pp. New York: Scribner, 1956. $3.00.

Reviewed by JOHN H. BRATT, Professor of Bible, Calvin College.

Can a Christian be a scholar without suffering spiritual loss? And conversely, can a scholar embrace Christianity and permit it to be determinative for him without losing his scientific objectivity and jeopardizing his professional standing? If scholarship be a legitimate calling for a Christian, what essentially is Christian scholarship? What problems does it face and how does the Christian scholar arrive at a sense of his calling? These and related questions occupy the attention of E. Harris Harbison in the Stone Lectures delivered at Princeton Seminary in 1955 and recently published by Scribner under the title, *The Christian Scholar in the Age of the Reformation.*

The author and lecturer, who is Professor of History at Princeton University, is convinced that even though saints and seers have overshadowed the religious thinker and scholar in Christian history, and even though there are hints of anti-intellectualism in Jesus and St. Paul and a definite anti-intellectual strain in the lunatic fringes of Christianity, yet scholarship is not only a legitimate pursuit but the high calling of the Christian under God. At three strategic points in history — when the Graeco-Roman civilization was in its death throes, in the high Middle Ages, and in the Reformation — the Christian scholar has played a crucial role. Harbison construes the calling of the Christian scholar to be to "(1) restudy the Hebraic-Christian tradition; (2) relate this tradition to the surrounding secular culture and its tradition; and (3) reconcile faith and science, in the broadest sense of the word." (p. 5)

Various ingredients go into the making of a Christian scholar. Notable among them is an adequate training, an insatiable intellectual appetite, a reflective temperament, a balanced judgment, a critical sensitivity, an appreciat capacity, a proper evaluation of pa learning, a high regard for the mary sources, and indispensably a s Christian commitment.

Harbison devotes the bulk of his tention to Erasmus, Luther, and Cal after giving a running sketch of greatest thinkers and writers of the ceding centuries. He discerns in rome, the first Christian scholar of n a wholesome emphasis on the prim sources and a concern for philologi detail (both of which found rebirth the Renaissance and the Protest Reformation), a courageous confr tation of fundamental problems, but so a deathly fear of pagan learn (so too in Petrarch, who likewise perienced tension between his love pagan learning and his devotion Christianity) which inclined Jero to turn his back on pagan authors a restrict himself to Christian source

Augustine had a far more wh some attitude. Pagan learning to h was not a courtesan who sought to l the Christian into her fatal embr but a rich legacy for the Christian seize, even as the departing Israeli despoiled the treasures of Egypt. addition to his other scholarly tra there is with St. Augustine as well with his spiritual heirs, Luther a Calvin, a basic commitment to Christian cause. This commitment d not preclude or prejudice scholarly deavor; rather it infuses it with and comports with the serious fact th a man's destiny is determined by reaction to the truth of God. Aug tine saw danger not in pagan learni but in learning *per se*, in idolizing t intellectual exercise, in "scholarship scholarship's sake."

That attitude found embodiment Abelard, the brilliant medieval agn

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ossessor of a keen mental appa- but a stranger to inner convic- the proprietor of an open mind should have been closed for re- , and a man devoid of any sancti- urpose. He unsettled men's minds projected innumerable questions. question he raised — whether tianity could absorb Aristotelian- r would succumb to it — received iction-inspired answer in the Do- can scholar, Thomas Aquinas, a of indefatigable energy and con- ted industry, who attempted to g Christianity and Aristotelianism rms and posited the thesis that the highway of reason and revelation s to the same terminal of truth.

he Revival of Learning, as the very n implies, had rich implications for istian scholarship. It unearthed brought to light priceless primary ces and it brought into proper fo- the historical perspective. Not the osophical and dialectical, not ab- ct truth, but grammar, philology, haeology, and history engaged the olarly mind. It produced a Lauren- Valla, who played the searchlight historical and philological criticism the ancient documents and thereby osed the *Donation of Constantine* a clever forgery; a Mirandola, whose tical sensitivities left much to be de- ed and whose indiscriminateness led n back into allegory and mysticism; Colet, with an admirable sense of lance between the detail and the al picture, who asserted that schol- ship must not miserly conserve its dings but communicate them for the nefit of all for "the art of knowing integrally related to the art of com- unicating" (p. 63), but who was mewhat vague in his conception of e medieval reshaping of Christianity nd who failed to see some of the ger- ane problems, for example, the need f relating Christian belief to a redis- overed pagan antiquity; and an Eras- us who revelled in the primary ources and sought by an historical nd linguistic study of the New Testa- nent to reshape and purify the Chris- ian tradition and relate it to classical ulture. Erasmus is patent illustration of the fact that scholarship means hard work and that its fruits must be rele- vant to the existential situation. But he lacked the basic Christian commit- ment and his cold rationalism led him to overevaluate pagan learning to the extent that he "moralizes antiquity and strips Christianity to a great extent of its miraculous and mystical elements" (p. 72).

Martin Luther, who did not regard himself as a scholar but whose excellent liberal arts training and unflagging industry harnessed in the service of study, lecturing, and teaching ensconced him in that position, perceived the major weakness of Erasmus. Erasmus had intellectual but not spiritual insight and therefore despite his admirable grammatico-historical emphasis did not really understand St. Paul. Basic commitment is a prerequisite to getting into the mind of the interpreter of Christ. Scholarship is more than mental acumen and ability to handle the sources; it demands a profound spiritual experience which, when joined to a grammatical, linguistic and historical study of the Word of God, yields fruits to the welfare of the Church and to the glory of God. Like Erasmus, he sought to reshape and purify the Christian tradition but unlike him, when reformatory efforts failed, he courageously launched forth on his own.

So too John Calvin, for whom Harbison has the highest regard. Here was a man who gathered many of the prerequisites in one person. He felt called to a life of seclusion and reflection but as he himself put it, "God thrust me into the game." Calvin was shaped by scholastic logic, by Roman law, and by classical studies pursued under the best teachers of his day. His was an unswerving, unfaltering Christian commitment which gave direction to the workings of a brilliant, incisive mind. He recognized elements of truth in pagan thought and he adapted techniques learned in classical scholarship to his study of the Bible. He was balanced (Harbison says that whereas Erasmus was too little involved in that to which he set his hand, Luther tended to become too much involved), systematic, and orderly, and like Colet before him a utilitarian in that he was convinced that all scholarship must serve the purpose of advancing the Kingdom of God.

And so it is. The Christian scholar in the atomic age also, utilizing every available tool and keeping abreast of contemporary trends, works diligently in conscious submission to his God who made both the knowing mind and the knowable world and gave His knowing Word; in the service of his Lord who promised, "If ye continue in my Word. . . . ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free"; and in the tradition of St. Paul who sought to "bring every thought in captivity to Christ."

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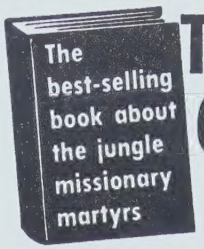

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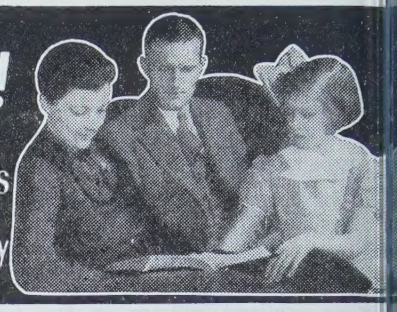

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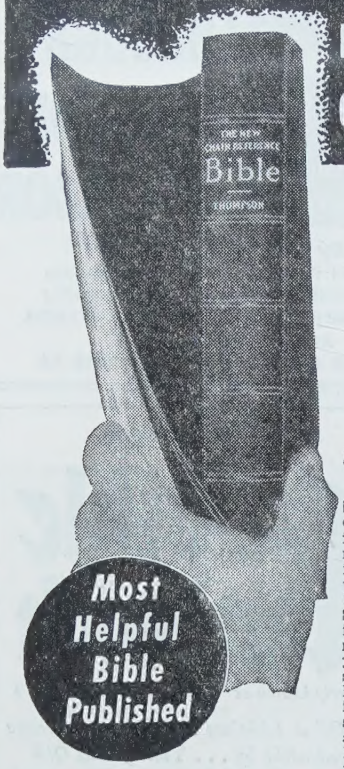

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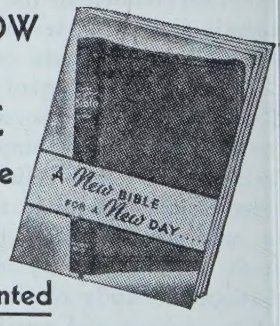

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